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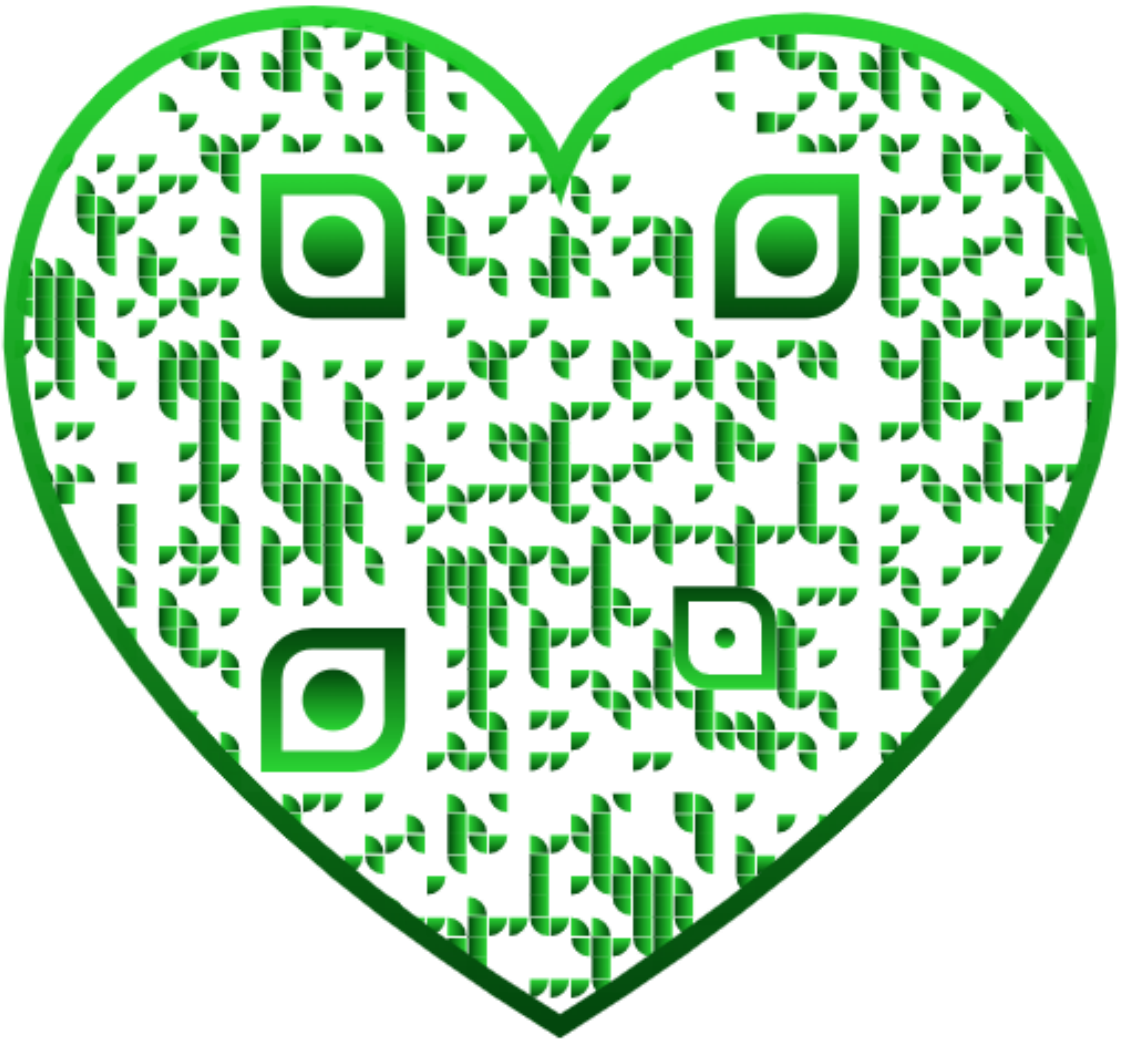

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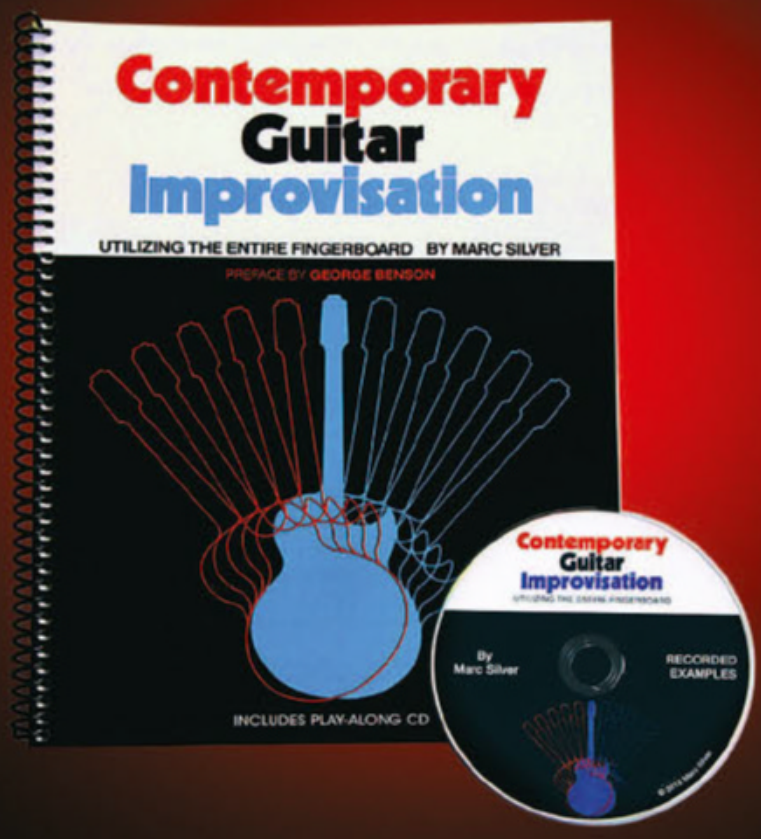

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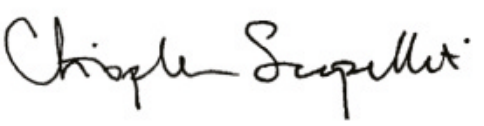
YES MEN

FOR MANY FANS of prog rock in the early 1970s, the arrival of the Yes album *Close to the Edge* in 1972 was not unlike the release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* some five years earlier. Like that early psychedelic landmark, *Close to the Edge* was a sprawling, genre-melding sonic wash of sound unlike anything anyone had heard before. From its 18-minute title track, which took up all of side one, through the operatic sweep of the 10-minute-long "And You and I" and the hard rock–jazz fusion of its closing track, the evocatively titled "Siberian Khatru," *Close to the Edge* wasn't just another album; it was a sonic journey that you experienced from one end to the other (preferably on headphones), and then, in all likelihood, repeated once the needle reached the inner groove of side two. It's little surprise many fans thought Yes hadn't just gone close to the edge — they'd gone clean over it.

Beyond the sheer grand scope of the album and level of musicianship displayed, what impressed me most about *Close to the Edge* was the ensemble playing on display. Just listening to it, you could tell Yes were a tight and supportive band. The music gave equal room to Steve Howe's breathtaking range of guitar virtuosity — from Duane Eddy–era rock and roll to John McLaughlin fusion — and Rick Wakeman's dazzling keyboard skills, all of which was ably supported by the melodic "lead" bass work of Chris Squire and the mind-blowing jazz-tinged drum work of Bill Bruford. The fact that they all performed this music on behalf of Jon Anderson's cryptic lyrics made the group seem like a sect of some mysterious religion.

The underlying sense I had was that this was how a band was supposed to be: like a supportive team. Which is very much the way Steve Howe describes Yes at this time in its development, in this month's cover story about the making of the album. If you've ever been a fan of *Close to the Edge*, you'll find Steve's stories about its creation a satisfying testament to the power of teamwork. Nothing sums it up better than the opening photo to our story, showing the group and its producer, Eddy Offord, at the console, mixing the album like one 12-armed recording engineer.

This issue is packed with plenty of great reads, including Martin McQuade's feature drawn from his interview with folk legend Ramblin' Jack Elliott. I also highly recommend our magazine's latest new department, Tip Sheet, where the great Bill Frisell serves up 10 bits of advice to make your guitar playing — and musical life — more satisfying. I hope you're having a great summer. Thanks for reading.



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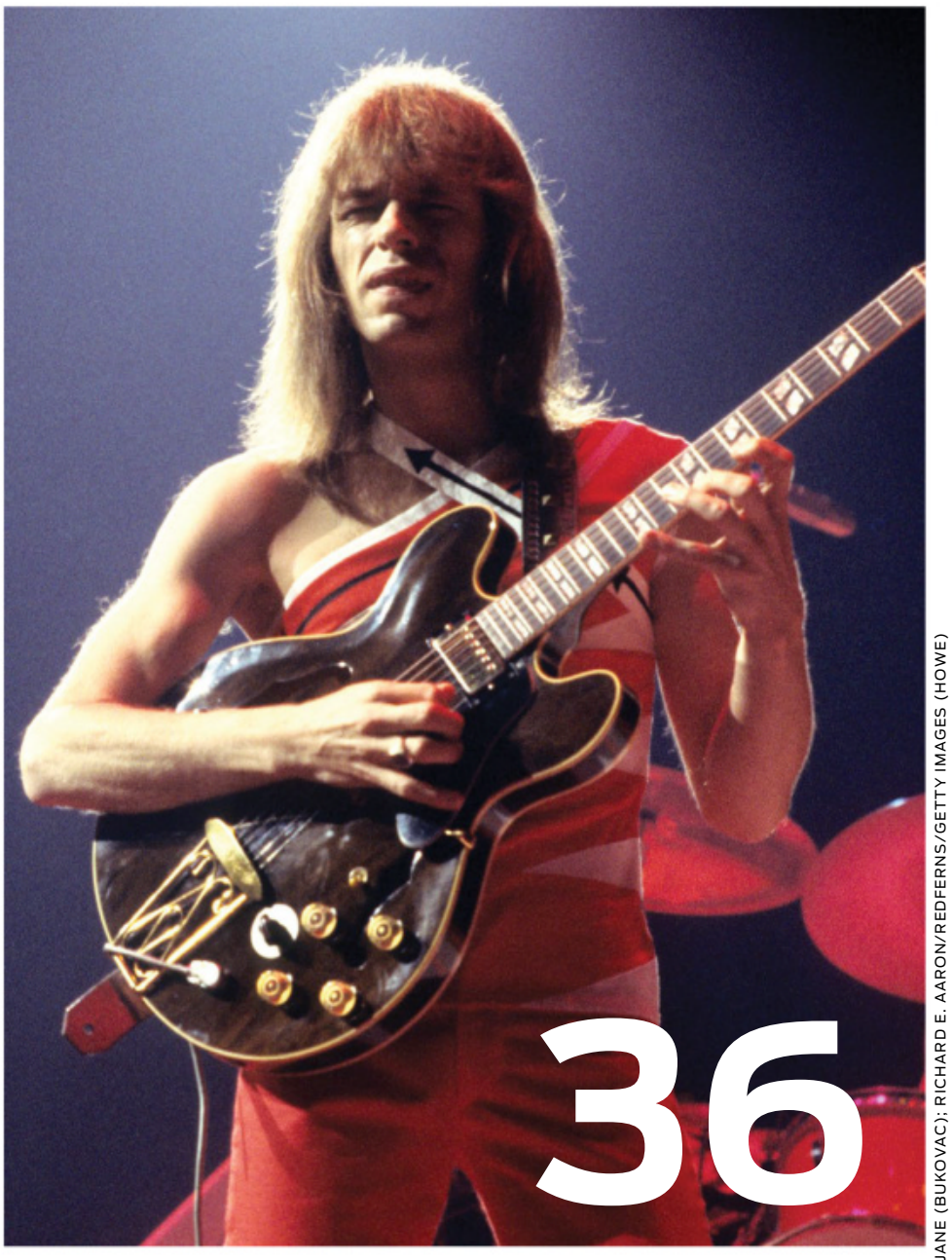
Steve Howe at Madison Square Garden, August 5, 1977.
Michael Putland/Getty Images



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EXPERIENCE HENDRIX

With the HDRX 100, Paul Reed Smith lets guitarists bask in the spirit of Jimi Hendrix's Marshall Super Lead.

BY ART THOMPSON

PAUL REED SMITH says listening to Jimi Hendrix's *Are you Experienced* album inspired him to play guitar as a teenager, setting him on a path as a musician and a guitar maker. In that latter capacity, Smith has devoted himself to investigating all the elements of great electric guitar designs and invented ways to improve them. The PRS record speaks for itself. The same level of commitment extends to amplifiers, which PRS introduced in 2007 after bringing Texas amp builder Doug Sewell onboard to create a line that includes the Archon, DG Custom 30, MT 15 and the new HDRX. So it's no surprise that Smith would focus his attention on an amplifier that was a mainstay for Hendrix — the circa-1967/68 Marshall Super Lead — and utilize his team's energies into recreating an amp that Jimi purportedly played at Woodstock and is now housed at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington.

The HDRX project began in 2018 when Smith and Sewell visited the museum to document the amplifier. "Studying Hendrix's amp not only showed us the circuit, which is well documented, but also what had been modified," Smith says. "We had to take what we were seeing and consider the guitars and pedals that were being used with it, as well as the fact that this amp was significantly modified, in part to work on American power without blowing up and in part to further dial-in the sound.

"WE CREATED AN AUTHENTIC-SOUNDING AMPLIFIER WITH ENOUGH POWER TO BLOW YOUR PANT LEG"

"Still, designing the HDRX was not an exercise in over-engineering," Smith continues. "It's a fairly straightforward build. We kept the historical aspects where it made sense, and we made substitutions where it made sense based on availability, safety and experience. In the end, I think we created an authentic-sounding amplifier with exceptional build quality and enough power to blow your pant leg when you play it."

Starting in the engine room, the HDRX 100 uses four Electro-Harmonix EL34s power tubes and has three JJ ECC 803S (12AX7) tubes in the preamp. The output transformer is a custom-designed "straight-edge" type (it came loose during shipping on the first amp we received), and the power supply and DC heaters are designed for low noise. Note that for tonal consistency, the 50- and 100-watt models use the same power supply. Sharp-eyed readers will notice the absence of a standby switch, which PRS says is

unnecessary due to the "historically correct high-power value filter caps." The manual recommends pulling the guitar cable slightly out of the input jack when you want to mute the signal.

The plywood cabinet is covered in black Tolex and features screened openings to provide airflow. The front and back panels are black Plexiglas with gold lettering and black pointer knobs. There's also an Authentic Hendrix logo along with Jimi's signature and a statement that reads, "Based on Jimi Hendrix's amplifier circuit in the permanent collection of Seattle's Museum of Pop Culture."

Circuitry inside the steel chassis is laid out on double-sided, through-hole PCBs, which PRS says improves both consistency and reliability over vintage-style tag-board construction. Still, there's a fair amount of hand wiring involved in connecting the control pots and the output-tube sockets. To facilitate servicing, there are bias jacks and a screwdriver-adjustable bias pot on the rear panel. There are also five speaker jacks: two 1x4 ohm or 2x8 ohm, two 1x8 ohm or 2x16 ohm, and one 16 ohm. The AC socket permits operation on 100, 120 and 230 volts by simply changing a fuse, and there's also a single H.T. fuse. Weight is a modest 41.5 pounds.

A single input jack replaces the four holes on a vintage Marshall, and the channels are internally jumpered. Controls from right to left are bass volume, treble volume, bass, treble, middle and presence. There's also a three-way bright switch and a high-mid gain switch that adds a cap to the circuit to enhance upper-midrange response. This was a mod discovered on the Hendrix amp, and PRS put it on a switch to give you a choice of having it in the circuit.

I tested the amp with a PRS HDRX 2x12 cabinet fitted with Celestion G12H-75 16-ohm speakers ($899; a 4x12 with the same speakers runs $1,199). I also used a Universal Audio OX to control the volume, as there's no master on this amp and it's extremely loud. This also allowed playing the HDRX through studio monitors, which is fun with all the rooms and options the OX offers.

PRS offers both a 2x12 and a 4x12 cabinet fitted with Celestion G12H-75 to pair up with the HDRX

The spirit of the HDRX is rooted in an era when volume was the objective and Marshall was king with the stacks it had developed for the world's top rock players. Things like master-volume controls, let alone attenuators or power soaks, weren't even in the picture, as they would have simply gotten in the way of what the Super Lead was designed to do — produce a lot of sound

on big stages at a time when P.A. systems weren't up to the task. The HDRX is an anachronism in that sense, but it sounds killer, and that's all that matters if you're into badass tube tone. With the volume controls set around noon or higher, there's a lot of grind on tap, and it's imbued with awesome dynamic feel and an in-your-face presence. Obviously, you can't experience the full glory of such an amp without playing it at top volume through a 4x12 (or two), but even through a 2x12 and throttled down, the HDRX is a muscular amplifier that sounds awesome for lead and still delivers a great dirty-rhythm sound when the guitar volume is turned down. Listen to Jimi's live playing on "Little Wing" or "Like a Rolling Stone" when he's not using the fuzz, and that's where the HDRX is coming from. As Smith puts it, "The HDRX is designed to push the high end so that it is very clear, but not so much that it's harsh, and it allows for aggression that can be backed off for smooth, sweet tones."

I mostly kept the bright switch off and the tone controls cranked, except for presence, which varied depending on whether a Strat or a Les Paul was used. Activating the high-mid gain switch subtly increases gain while emphasizing upper-midrange bite. Hendrix must have dug this tweak because West Coast Organ and Amp Service — Jimi's Southern California–based amp modder — hardwired it into the Super Lead's circuit. They also replaced the power transformer with what PRS calls a "cherry-picked" unit. A photo in the accompanying brochure shows a paper label on the transformer housing that lists the electrical specs.

It took some four years to get the HDRX up and running according to PRS, which isn't surprising considering the effort required to re-create a particular Marshall Super Lead used by Hendrix, while doing so in a way that enhances just about everything (tube quality notwithstanding) that made these amps so famous more than five decades ago. The HDRX isn't for everyone, but if you want an amplifier that replicates what Hendrix plugged into at Woodstock, it delivers. It's a beast unto itself and a thrilling ride to an era of guitar amplification when it was all about going big.

The rear panel has speaker and bias jacks, a bias adjust pot and a statement verifying the origin of the amp's circuit design

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Josh Smith with his Ibanez FLATV1 signature guitar

"IT WAS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IT OLD-SCHOOL LIVE. KENNY BURRELL DIDN'T FIX HIS SOLOS, SO I WASN'T TEMPTED"

GOING BIG

Josh Smith's band grows a larger horn section. The result is his big-band extravaganza *Bird of Passage*.

BY MICHAEL ROSS | PHOTOGRAPH BY MACKENZIE LENORA

FORMER FLORIDIAN JOSH SMITH has carved out his place in the guitar firmament through his high-powered, hybrid-picked, heavy-stringed mixture of blues bends and jazz sophistication. He was already playing professionally at age 13, touring the same circuit as contemporary prodigies Derek Trucks and Joe Bonamassa. By the end of the century, Smith, just turned 30, already had two decades of touring and four records under his own name. Looking to broaden his horizons, he and his wife moved to Los Angeles, where he began plying his trade as a sideman.

Major gigs followed, including tours with 2006 *American Idol* winner Taylor Hicks and Raphael Saadiq, and backing Mick Jagger at the 2011 Grammy Awards and Kennedy Center Honors. Smith still found time to release a slew of solo records and to build a home studio, Flat V, where he records his own music as well as that of others. He has also built a burgeoning career as a producer for Reese Wynans, Eric Gales, Andy Timmons, Jimmy Hall, Larry McCray and others.

For his latest release, *Bird of Passage* (Flat V Studios), Smith expanded his compact R&B horn section into a full big band, and eschewed saxophones in favor of an all-brass group of multiple trumpets, trombones and French horns. Such decisions raised interesting questions, and Smith was game to answer them all.

Why do a big-band record?

I was always curious what it would sound like to do a very traditional Blue Note big-band-style record, but with me playing like myself over the top of it. One of my best friends, [*Smith's bassist*] Calvin Turner, has been prodding me to do it for years. He wrote the record with me and arranged the horns. I've done a smaller R&B horn section before, but these arrangements have a vibe like Quincy Jones, Sinatra with Count Basie's band, and Grant Green or Kenny Burrell with a big band. I wanted to keep it around that 38-minute Blue Note length, and I wanted to mostly play my Telecaster and use my normal tone.

Did Calvin study arranging?

He did. He's arranged horns on pretty much every record I've produced. He said, "I would like to do this slightly differently. I think I'll use French horns instead of saxes." And I said, "I'll leave that part up to you." He's much smarter at those things than I am. [*laughs*]

What did you record first?

Doing a big band is not easy, especially with a low budget. My studio here is great, but not big enough for that. We tracked the quartet — me, Calvin, Lamar Carter on drums and

Larry Goldings on organ — here, 100 percent live. Calvin had written out very meticulous charts for the horn parts. We were all reading, but Lamar had to be the most cognizant of the important hits. Calvin said, "Lamar, I need you to hit this," or, "Larry I need you to hit this." We would make notes on our charts and then play it down live. I already knew where the big moments were. Calvin had sent me MP3 files with the horns played by a synthesizer so I could listen and say, "I like this," or, "I don't like that." That being said, I'm playing melody most of the time. It was more the other guys who focused on the hits so they would line up with the horns.

Did you play to a click?

Yes. We finished the quartet tracks in one day, and then Calvin and I flew to Nashville to do the horns. We work with those guys a lot and have a good rapport. It was really important to me to do the horns in complete takes, so everything you hear is one pass. There's no stacking; it's a big band. They played it down just like we did, as if it was a gig.

Once the horns were added and you heard it back, did you feel like you wanted to go back and re-record anything that you played?

No, it was really important to me to keep it as old-school live as possible. Kenny Burrell didn't go back and fix any of his solos, so I wasn't even tempted.

Kenny Burrell was probably responding to horn players in real time, whereas while you were playing with the horns in the back of your mind, they weren't actually there.

You're right. In hindsight I could have maybe changed some things to go with the horns a little more. I didn't really think about it that way. I had also lived with the quartet versions for a few weeks before we did the horns, and they had grown on me.

Do you think the concept changed how you played when recording with the quartet?

Not consciously, but knowing that there were gaps that would be filled meant I didn't need to fill everything. For example, on the slow blues, "Brand New," I knew there was going to be the big-band Sinatra-type thing, so I didn't play through all the holes. On "The Wayfarer," there's a big ramp up in the middle of the solo where we go from minor to major toward this big release. I knew when we got to that release there were horn stabs underneath me. I didn't hold myself back, but I was at least cognizant of that.

"The Wayfarer" is epic. It's like a big-band jazz version of a Gary Moore power ballad.

Calvin wrote it. He sent me a demo of him playing guitar almost chord-melody style but said, "I want you to approach it like Roy Buchanan." The second he said that, I knew exactly how the song would sound. I'm really proud of it. It has a flow from beginning to end, where it never stops building.

What guitars did you play for the tracking session?

It was recorded in 2019, when were still prototyping my Ibanez [*FLATV1*] signature guitar, so for 75 percent of the record it was my main Chapin T-Bird. On "Brand New," I'm playing a P-90–equipped archtop made by John Case from London for that T-Bone Walker thing. On "Hopeless Quarters," I'm playing a Ronan guitar with a vintage D'Armond pickup and flatwound strings. That's the most jazzy tone on the record.

The amps were the same on every song: my Morgan JS12, which is my signature Princeton-type combo with a 12-inch speaker, combined with a '55 dual-rectifier tweed Fender Bassman I got from [*Joe*] Bonamassa. They were on together the whole time, along with my main distortion, the Lovepedal Tchula, and a TC Flashback Mini with my slapback delay TonePrint.

The first short solo on "Rare Plus" sounds like there's an octave device on the guitar.

It's Larry doubling me. It's a lick I improvised and Calvin wrote it out for Larry, who read it down. I didn't know Larry very well, but I'd met him many times and was a massive fan. There was nobody else I would call for this project. It was a thrill having him at my studio. He's a monster.

How did you mic the guitars?

I had two old Shure Unidyne 57s, one on each amp. I also had a Mesanovic ribbon mic, which is like a Royer, on the Morgan. I actually prefer it to the Royer for guitar. I also used a Neumann U 67–style for the room sound. We were all in the same room, but our amps were isolated. The only thing in the room with us was the drums.

Obviously, touring this project would be difficult, but would you consider a one-off show to offer as a video?

I actually did a performance of "The Wayfarer" via satellite with the Army Jazz Messengers, their top-flight big band. That video came out on Memorial Day. They played live, and then I overdubbed on top, but we hope to do it in person in the future.

There is also the WDR Big Band in Germany...

... I reached out to them already. [*laughs*]

You're way ahead of me.

There are a lot of big-band societies around Europe, as well as university bands. I'd love to do some of that. I have these great charts and I'd like to try to take advantage of them. There is also a plan to book a gig in Nashville so I can use the guys on the record and get a video recording. That would be a blast.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Bird of Passage

"Doublecross," "Brand New," "Fat Hair," "The Wayfarer"

OLLY CURTIS

TIP SHEET

Grammy-winning jazz guru Bill Frisell delivers advice to make performance a pleasure.

BY ROD BRAKES

PHOTOGRAPH BY MONICA JANE FRISELL

BILL FRISELL IS a giant among giants of the jazz guitar world. A contemporary of such legends as Johnny Smith (from whom he received lessons) and Pat Metheny (who gave him his first major break), he has spent a lifetime in music honing his craft. Along the way, he's picked up a thing or two. And while he acknowledges that learning and practice are essential, he says there is more to being a musician than many people think.

Frisell is the subject of a new biography, *Bill Frisell, Beautiful Dreamer: The Guitarist Who Changed the Sound of American Music*, by Philip Watson (Faber & Faber). *Guitar Player* caught up with Frisell to talk about the finer points of musicianship and learn his top 10 tips for guitarists.

1. LISTEN

Listening is number one — taking attention away from yourself. In one way, it was good to get back to practicing and being in my own head during the COVID lockdown. But when you're playing with a band, you need to have your attention away from yourself. It helps me so much to just look at the other people in the band when we're playing together. It's such a simple thing, but it really does so much. Listening is huge. It sounds simple, but it's a lifelong struggle.

2. DON'T JUDGE YOURSELF

What we perceive we're doing when we play often has hardly anything to do with what's coming out the front. At the time you might think, This is the most badass stuff I've ever

played in my life! And then you'll listen to a recording of it and go, What was I thinking? Or, you could be having some crisis in your head, thinking, I just can't play anything! But when you listen back, you hear it's beautifully formed. All that stuff in your head — you have to shut it down. Get rid of all that and just be immersed in the music. Try not to attach yourself to whatever just happened. You have to be constantly shedding off the idea it was good or bad.

3. BE PRESENT

If you have a really great night, you can't think, That was so great — let's do that again at the next gig. It was great because you and your bandmates were all in the moment and responding to whatever was going on around you. You just have to be as present as you can at all times. It's the most amazing thing when the whole band is in the moment. It's like you're not thinking.

LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES

4. EMBRACE MISTAKES

Mistakes are awesome — if you don't freak out. Again, it's about listening. If you make a mistake, what you play after it can make it sound right. If everyone in the band is in the zone, listening and trusting each other, it's like you're rescuing each other all the time.
It's not supposed to be a contest. I'm really not into the whole "I'm right and you're wrong" thing. Let's try to make something cool with what just happened.

5. PRACTICE IS GREAT (UP TO A POINT)

I used to think that if you practiced really hard, you'd get to this place where everything is great all the time. But it's just not so. The joy is being in the process. You can't think, I'm going to practice and get to this certain point, and then I'm going to do something. Because you'll never get there. You just have to go for it right now and do the best you can, and keep on pushing ahead.

6. DON'T THINK FOR OTHERS

You're the only one who truly knows how successful you are. If you're worried about what somebody else is going to think, it's just another thing that gets in the way of doing it. Because you're never going to know what the audience is hearing. For me, the most honest way to perform is to think: I love this and I'm going to do it as best I can. If I'm feeling some kind of joy in what I'm doing, then hopefully the audience is going to hear that and get off on it. And if they don't hear it, well, there's nothing I can do about that.

"THE MUSIC GETS MUCH HIGHER WHEN EVERYONE IN A BAND FEELS SAFE THAT THEY CAN TAKE A CHANCE"

7. BE YOURSELF

I definitely spent time early on trying to be cool. Maybe there would be a song I liked, but I thought it was kind of corny, so I didn't want people to know I really liked it. But as time went by, I realized I had to be honest about who I am and where I came from. I can't take on the persona of someone else. I wasn't a jazz guy who grew up in the '30s and '40s; I grew up in Denver in the '50s and '60s. Being honest with your own experience is going to make things way stronger. Don't be afraid to show who you are and where you come from.

8. DESTROY COMPETITION

This whole idea that music is about competition — it doesn't make sense. I love what John Andrew Rice, one of the founders of Black Mountain College, said: "There are things learned through observation that cannot be learned any other way. Whatever cannot be expressed in words cannot be learned through words... The worthwhile struggle is the interior one, not against one's fellows but against one's ignorance and clumsiness." Instead of trying to keep score, we should just be helping each other. We know how successful we are with trying to do what we're trying to do — and that's enough to worry about. We don't have to be putting that on somebody else. John Andrew Rice thought there shouldn't be a winner and a loser in a debate — he believed it was about finding the truth as opposed to being a contest. That's how I feel about music. Let's try to get together and make something good. It's not a competition.

9. TAKE CHANCES

The music gets much higher when everyone in a band feels safe that they can take a chance. It's a lot better to just go for it than to be thinking, I better not try that because I might mess it up. It might be good or bad, but that's how you learn. It's the only way to move ahead.

10. LEARN TO FORGET

I know we need to practice our instruments, but you need to be able to shake that off when you're really trying to play the music. If I practice all day and have all that stuff in my head later on at the gig, it can be detrimental. If I'm learning a song, I want to get it so deep down inside me that I'm not thinking about mathematics or numbers — that place where it becomes automatic. Sonny Rollins, who is one of my biggest heroes, said music is happening too fast to be thinking about it while you're playing. That totally makes sense to me.

Joe Ely performing at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

ANTHONY PIDGEON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Joe Ely shares highlights from his rockabilly career and recalls his former Lubbock, Texas, neighbor: Buddy Holly.

BY MARK McSTEA

IN A PARALLEL universe, Joe Ely is a household name, filling stadiums and being lauded as a master storyteller shoulder to shoulder with Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. Both of those guys have doffed their metaphorical cap to the Texan's unique ability to fit a short story's worth of emotional depth and breadth into a three-minute song. Ely's take on that is simple: "I like to tell in a song where the location is, paint the background, and then bring it into a rhythmic world and try to find something that doesn't take away from it, but adds to it," he says. When reminded that he once quipped, "I chase songs and I catch one of them every once in a while," the Lubbock, Texas, native laughs. "I've got a whole bunch that I chased for many years but never caught," he reflects. "Sometimes it's like a stew or something: They can sit and simmer for many years until something might happen that lets you finish them."

Ely started out on violin before he took to guitar. "I had been playing the violin since third grade," he says. "But when I moved to Lubbock, the school didn't have a music department, so I thought I'd just write my own music, and picked up the guitar."

Lubbock's most famous son is, of course, Buddy Holly, but Ely, who was just six days shy of 12 when the rock and roll pioneer died on February 3, 1959, grew up unaware that he hailed from his town. "He actually grew up about eight houses down from where I grew up," Ely remarks, "but I only realized that years later when someone was telling me that Buddy grew up on 28th Street in Lubbock, and I thought, Hold on — that's where I grew up! We could well have passed each other on the street. When I listened to some of those outtakes and rehearsals of his, I could hear that he was influenced by some of the same forces that I was, like Carl Perkins and Bo Diddley. All those different rhythms that he merged, with such simple and beautiful lyrics. I was just ripped apart when he was killed. He was so ahead of his time in so many ways."

Having played country for years, Ely found himself on new musical turf when he became friends with the Clash in 1979. He opened up for the pioneering punk rock group on U.S and U.K. tours in the early 1980s, and introduced his unique flavor of rockabilly-fueled country to new wave audiences that had never heard anything like it before. "When we played with the Clash, it was almost like a band of long-lost brothers, as we both fit into each

Onstage with Bruce Springsteen at the Austin Music Awards, March 14, 2012

other's influences," Ely says. "It was highly unusual, but it worked. I have a recording that was never released from a rehearsal at the Hope and Anchor, for our *Live Shots* album, recorded in London. It was just a really small pub, and some of the Clash came by and we recorded about seven songs together. It shows the point where the two bands collided. I still had a steel player and was very country-oriented in a way, but rhythmically, things kicked up a few notches." That is perhaps an understatement. *Musta Notta Gotta Lotta,* his album from that time, released in 1981, is the hardest-rocking record in Ely's catalog. The title track itself is the greatest song Jerry Lee Lewis never wrote.

Ely's first album was issued in 1971, when he was part of the Flatlanders, with fellow Texans Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock. He's continued to work with them, sporadically, over the years, most recently on 2021's *Treasure of Love*. "That's an album where we're mainly covering the songs that influenced us growing up," he reveals. Ely's

"SOMEONE WAS TELLING ME THAT BUDDY GREW UP ON 28TH STREET IN LUBBOCK, AND I THOUGHT, HOLD ON — THAT'S WHERE I GREW UP!"

last album under his own name was 2020's *Love in the Midst of Mayhem*. "I woke up one morning and the world had changed with the pandemic," he explains. "I started digging back and finding a bunch of old love songs of mine that I hadn't recorded, that I thought would help people feel better through the pandemic. I know a lot of people were flipping out about what was going on in the world."

Ely has been releasing his music on his own label, Rack 'Em Records, since 2007, and has plenty of projects in the pipeline, including a previously unreleased live recording with one-time Rolling Stones sax player the late Bobby Keys. "I always felt like I wasn't free to work at my own pace," he explains of the decision to found the label. "It took so long for the label and the publishing to come together, and I found that it was easier to do it myself. I could work a lot better at my pace, without a record company holding a magnifying glass to everything. It gives me a lot of freedom, and I can put out things on my label that might not have a home elsewhere."

There's plenty coming up in Ely's future. Universal is set to reissue his first three albums for MCA as a box set in 2023, and he's releasing a book of lyrics as well as a sequel to his first novel, *Reverb: An Odyssey*. "That book was pretty much autobiographical, although I did change a number of things for the sake of the story," he says. And, of course, he continues to write songs. "Times and friends change, and the world is always changing, so there's always something to write a song about," he says. As for his Five Songs selections, he explains, "Picking five was very difficult, but it gave me a chance to review different areas of my songwriting and see how it's changed over the years."

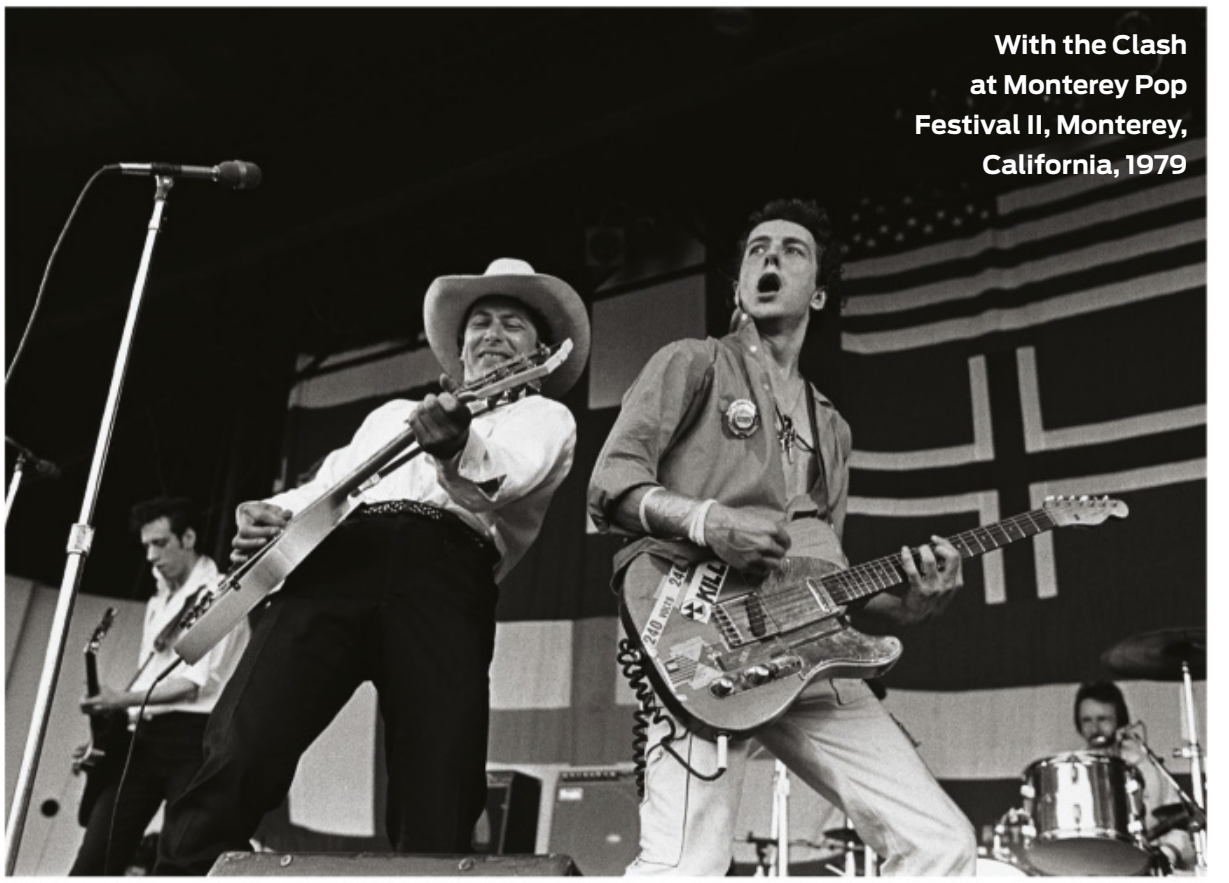
"MUSTA NOTTA GOTTA LOTTA"
JOE ELY, *MUSTA NOTTA GOTTA LOTTA* (1981)

"This one came at a time when I was going through some changes in my music. We were touring the U.K. with the Clash, about 1979, and it was almost like their songs and mine were being influenced by the same forces. My love of rock and roll was a big part of that. Lyrically, the songs I was working on changed; I rediscovered my rockabilly roots. I think it was actually good timing for the rockabilly side of me to come out, particularly in the U.K., which had a very strong rockabilly and traditional rock and roll scene. They never abandoned that music, as we did in the States for a while. You can see that from how the Stray Cats did so well over there before they broke through here. There were changes going on with the Clash as well. There is some great soloing on this from Jesse Taylor, and from Lloyd Maines on steel guitar. Those guys combined everything they knew and put it into that band. When the Clash came to the U.S., I showed them around Texas — San Antonio, the Alamo and places like that. They'd previously shown us around all the interesting places in London. I remember that as a really great time."

"ALL JUST TO GET TO YOU"
JOE ELY, *LETTER TO LAREDO* (1995)

"Bruce Springsteen sings backing vocals on this, and I really like the way our voices work together on those parts. We were doing a benefit together — he'd asked me to be a part of it — and that was the start of a really long friendship that I've had with him. He's a great guy to hang out with, and I really like his way

GARY MILLER/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES


With the Clash at Monterey Pop Festival II, Monterey, California, 1979

of painting characters and their backgrounds. He tells a great story. We started to play quite a lot of shows together. I really like to work with other people and see their take on a song and how they develop it. I've been going through old boxes of notes from the road and finding little pieces of songs — just the first things I'd written for them when they were just coming to life. It's been very interesting. This is one of those songs that I remember writing and thinking it was taking the listener on a journey. I like to find a way to draw the listener in, maybe make them wonder where things are going to go and perhaps even surprise them with how things might turn out. Songs are multidimensional; you can go backward and forward in time."

"THE HIGHWAY IS MY HOME"

JOE ELY, *SATISFIED AT LAST* (2011)

"This song is unusual for me, as the organ is the dominant sound on this track. This whole album moved into a different direction for me, after touring with different songwriters that I really liked, a lot of whom were from the rock world — guys like Tom Petty. We shared a love of the old-style rock and roll and rockabilly from the 1950s and how it turned into country rock in the 1980s. Now the borders between genres are so blurred that I don't know what kind of descriptions to apply to a lot of what I hear. That's good though, because it opens up doors for different ideas, and that's kinda been my motto: Anything goes. I don't like to paint myself into a corner where there are too many rules. Songs like this are an example of that, I think, where the organ sound deviates from what someone would expect to hear on one of my records. I picked this because it's an interesting take on where I am now. I've been on the road my whole life, and this song really reflects the life of a traveling, working musician, I guess. I have no regrets though, I've made mistakes, but so has everyone. I try to turn mine into songs. That's my psychotherapy." [*laughs*]

At Fitzgerald's, in Berwyn, Illinois, November 2, 1995

"YOU CAN BET I'M GONE"

JOE ELY, *SATISFIED AT LAST* (2011)

"This was a song that I wrote when I was having a hard time with my personal life, and it helped me straighten out. A lot of times I'll write a song instead of going to a therapist. [*laughs*] It's cheaper — and more efficient. I like the lyrics to this one a lot. I found the line 'This old world is a funny place, you're always running the same old race' when I was going through my boxes of notes. The line, 'You can measure your riches by the ones you love' is something I very strongly believe to be true.

"A LOT OF TIMES I'LL WRITE A SONG INSTEAD OF GOING TO A THERAPIST. IT'S CHEAPER — AND MORE EFFICIENT"

"I don't hear a lot of real country anymore on the radio. It's getting more and more pop every day. A song like this would have a hard time getting played on modern country radio. It seems like we're forgetting what it is that makes great country music — not just a lyric that tells a story but a musical setting that doesn't pander to modern rock and pop fashions and trends."

"INDIAN COWBOY"

JOE ELY, *LIVE IN AUSTIN TEXAS* (2015)

"I'd been in New York for a few months, freezing to death playing the folk clubs and walking the streets. I came back to Lubbock, my home at the time, and ran into Guy Clarke. I remember playing this song for him, saying that I wrote it when I used to work at a circus. I joined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, taking care of the llamas and the world's smallest horse. He didn't believe me. [*laughs*] I was only with them for about two months, traveling through Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. It was a great time. I was actually a big fan of the circus, because it was such a colorful folksy place, with wild stories that I could use later in my life for song ideas. I chose this song because it was from a time in my life when my writing changed. It had been influenced by folk music before it merged into the storytelling phase of my life. I used to jump freight trains when I was a kid; my father worked on the Rock Island railroad. I quit school when I was about 17, I guess, and I went out into the world. I've been looking through my old notebooks, reading stories that I wrote while I was on the road. That experience was a turning point to open up different parts of a song."

GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES (CLASH); PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (ELY)

CELEBRATING
ALL PARTS
1982 2022
40th
ANNIVERSARY

CELEBRATING
40 YEARS OF
PREMIUM TOOLS FOR TONE

SCAN ME

The Flirty Dozen

Fender's Electric XII wooed late-'60s guitarists, but the course of true love ran any way but smooth.

FOR A BRIEF period in the mid 1960s, the electric 12-string guitar was setting pop soundscapes on fire, and it seemed the instrument would be with us forever — until, virtually overnight, it wasn't. Certainly Rickenbacker's 360/12 of 1964 set the standard, as played by both the Beatles' George Harrison and the Byrds' Roger McGuinn on some of the most influential 12-string-laden recordings of the era. The Fender Electric XII of 1965 was a cleverly designed attempt to grab a slice of the market. And while the 12-string fad faded faster than the company could have predicted, the Electric XII found its way onto a surprising number of iconic recordings.

The '60s were an appropriately swinging time at Fender, and the company launched a number of hip new designs both before and after CBS's takeover of the operation in early 1965. Like so much of the guitar-gear market that decade, the Beatles' massive success might have driven some such ideas, including the Electric XII and the thinline Coronado electric that came out alongside it, a guitar not a mile away design-wise from the Epiphone Casinos the Fab Four were using. (Indeed, Fender was actively courting the Beatles and succeeded in late 1968, as evidenced by the plethora of guitars and amps, and the Fender Rhodes electric piano, in footage of the group recording *Let It Be* in January 1969.)

Like so many things launched behind a trend, neither the Electric XII nor the Coronado had much longevity, but both certainly made a splash here. Members of the house band in the 1968 Elvis Presley movie *Speedway* mime on an Electric XII, a Stratocaster and a Precision Bass, while Presley briefly shreds, thumps and strums a Coronado II. Apart from the elongated "sore thumb" headstock, the Electric XII is recognizably Fender in many ways, including its bolt-on neck, an offset-waist body that is a clear relative of the Jazzmaster and Jaguar, and the 25 ½–inch scale length found on the bigger flagship Fender models, which adds tighter lows and extra harmonic shimmer to that 12-string jangle when compared to guitars of shorter scale lengths.

The Electric XII's two split-single-coil pickups had not appeared on any previous Fender guitar, but they did seem to be a clear descendant of the pickup on the Precision Bass, and would be echoed on the Mustang Bass of 1966, as well as the Custom, the Frankensteinian six-string effort that would help to use up unwanted Electric XII parts a few years down the road. These pickups were wired through an unusual four-position switch that, in addition to the traditional neck, both and bridge settings, offered a fourth setting with the pickups together in parallel but out of phase, for a funky, scooped-sounding breed of chime.

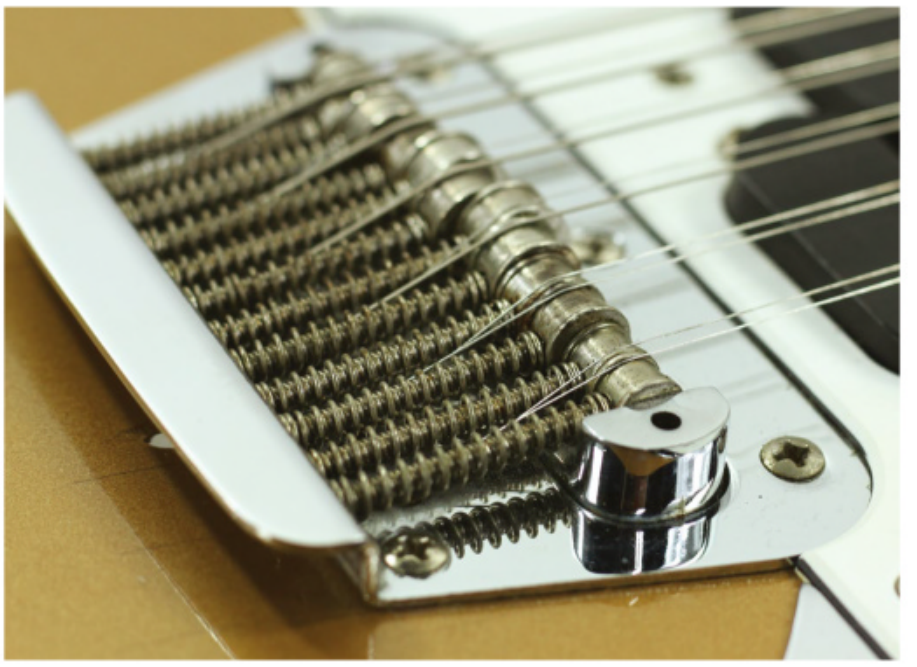
In addition to the two prominent rows of six tuners on the headstock, the bridge is another substantial piece of hardware, and quite a clever creation. It begins with a trapezoidal steel plate like that used on the Duo Sonic II, released the year before, but it ups the ante with 12 individually adjustable barrel saddles (perhaps inspired by those on the Mustang vibrato bridge), held firmly in place by a metal support structure. It's both solid and fully

The XII shares features with other Fender guitars, including the offset-waist body, the bolt-on neck and the bridge. This 1965 example has a custom Firemist Gold Metallic finish.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Solid ash body, in offset style similar to Fender Jazzmaster and Jaguar
- 25.5" scale length
- Maple neck with rosewood fingerboard
- Elongated "hockey stick" headstock
- Two split-single-coils pickups, four-way selector switch
- Top-strung bridge with 12 individually adjustable barrel saddles

BY DAVE HUNTER



intonatable, and it's arguably superior to the Rickenbacker's 12-string bridge, which, despite having individually adjustable saddles, is rather clunky and awkward.

Like many Fender guitars of the era, the Electric XII came standard in sunburst, but it can also easily be found in a range of custom colors since that program was firing on all cylinders in Fullerton by the mid '60s. The beautiful 1965 example featured this issue was sprayed at the factory in Firemist Gold Metallic, a color that remains impressively bright and lively today.

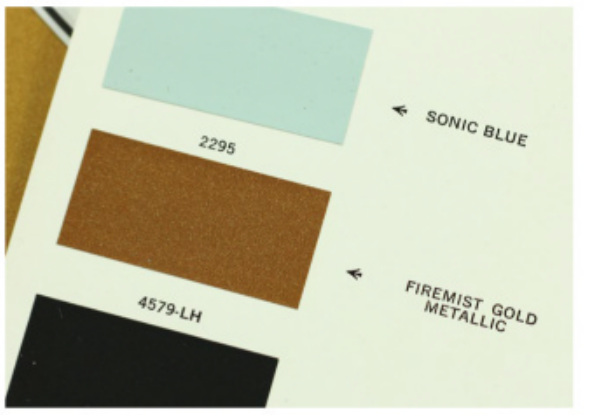
As it happens, Gene Clark played a Firemist Gold Metallic Electric XII much like this one on the Byrds' performance of "Mr. Tambourine Man" on the TV show *Hullabaloo* on May 11, 1965, presenting the double irony of setting down the tambourine he usually played on the song and standing right alongside Roger McGuinn playing his Rickenbacker 360/12 (the guitar used on the actual session, and of course the very instrument that helped launch the 12-string sensation in the first place).

Otherwise, Fender's seminal electric 12-string proved more a studio weapon than an easily identifiable stage prop. Jimmy Page played an Electric XII on Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven," while Pete Townshend used one on "Sparks" and "Underture" from the Who's 1969 rock opera, *Tommy*. The model also found use in the hands of the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson, the Wrecking Crew's Billy Strange (who played that

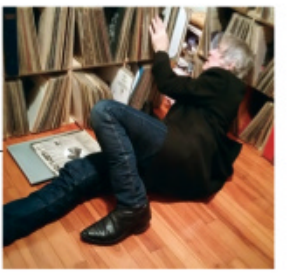
JIMMY PAGE PLAYED THE XII ON "STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN," WHILE PETE TOWNSHEND USED ONE ON *TOMMY*

12-string part in the Beach Boys' 1966 hit "Sloop John B"), Tim Buckley, and the Velvet Underground's Lou Reed and Sterling Morrison.

As the electric 12-string craze receded, so did the popularity of the Electric XII, and it was deleted from the Fender catalog after 1969. Apparently having pre-cut more bodies and necks than demand would call for, Fender introduced the six-string Maverick, soon renamed the Custom, that same year, using parts intended for the Electric XII. Bodies were hacked into a modernist offset profile to disguise their origins, but the full ungainly headstock remained, albeit with only six tuners installed. The guitars included a pair of the XII's split-single-coil pickups, its four-way switch, and a Mustang vibrato tailpiece and barrel-saddle bridge. Some 600 to 800 were manufactured before the Custom was deleted in 1972. Despite its short original run, the Electric XII of 1965 to '69 remains a powerful chime-and-jangle tool, in the studio in particular, and is one of relatively few post-CBS Fender designs to have attained collectability.



GUITAR COURTESY OF WELL STRUNG GUITARS. PHOTOS BY MADDIE PATCH



BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Confidence, Man

Impossible to upstage, Roy Brown let his guitarists try their best.

ROY BROWN'S ALBUM

Laughing But Crying was released on the Route 66 label in 1977 and features some of his greatest sides from 1947 to 1959. There are a group of select vocalists who transcend melody and communicate their message directly, like it was sent through a telephone line. Billie Holiday, John & Paul, Curtis Mayfield, Merle Haggard, Bon Scott and Julie London all have this effect on me. So does Roy Brown.

Roy was born in 1925 and performed a unique style of jump blues that combined swing, jazz and gospel. He was also a songwriter and composed "Good Rocking Tonight," the much-covered 1947 jump-blues number that anticipated rock and roll. Some call him a shouter, but I would insist this is grossly inaccurate. He could belt out a tune that could melt a microphone, but his vocal power shouldn't be trivialized as "shouting."

Surely, Roy was influenced by spirituals, but to my ears, he is a blues opera singer. I love how he would have a target note and hit a perfect intervallic sweet spot. This is similar to how an acoustic guitar has certain notes that vibrate and resonate the wood, and, in a similar way, Roy Brown hit notes that resonate my heart. He also had a dramatic flair that always made his stories totally believable. One could feel that he lived everything he sang about and, like a good friend, was telling us all about it.

During his 1940s and '50s heyday, he was aware of the popularity of guitarist/singers like B.B. King and others, so Roy — always commercially savvy — gave the guitarists in his group plenty of room to play. This generosity was aptly used by his fine bullpen of players, which included Bill Jones, Bill Jennings, Jimmy Davis, Edgar Blanchard and others, some of whom are credited as "unknown" on this release.

AWARE OF THE POPULARITY OF GUITARIST/SINGERS LIKE B.B. KING, ROY GAVE HIS GUITARISTS PLENTY OF ROOM TO PLAY

Every track on this fine LP swings as hard as anything I've ever heard, but to my ears the stand-out cuts are timeless gems. Roy gives an Oscar-worthy Best Actor vocal performance. On every chorus, he seamlessly segues from a maniacal laugh to a sorrowful sob that's astonishing to hear. He captures the internal struggle of flip-flopping during heartsickness. Guitarist Jimmy Davis makes full use of the guitar chair on the title cut as he deftly dances around Roy's voice with blues artistry and a dash of lovely raunchiness. I wasn't aware of Davis until this LP, but his playing is spectacular. On "Letter From Home," Mr. Davis almost steals the show playing 64th-note double-stops and animated slides, but of course, it's utterly impossible to upstage Roy Brown.

My other favorite track is "Butcher Pete (Part One)." Kind readers, you have to check this one out. "Butcher Pete" is about an unmanageable, totally unhinged and sex-obsessed guy named Pete who wreaks havoc wherever he goes. The thinly disguised innuendos, the group shout-out and Roy's vocal performance make this track as hilarious and entertaining as it is swinging. Leroy Rankins plays a baritone sax solo that sears through the changes, and his apartment-shaking low note (on the downbeat of bar five) is glorious. At the song's end, Roy proclaims, "Hey! Turn this record over! You ain't heard nuthin' yet!" as he challenges us to listen to part two and hear more about ol' Butcher Pete's antics. Me? I'm all in.

Unfortunately Roy Brown's career stalled in the 1960s. With his back against the wall, he sold the rights to his cash cow, "Good Rocking Tonight," and eventually he was selling encyclopedias door to door. Per Wikipedia, Roy's tax problems led to him getting jailed for tax evasion by the IRS. Yep, just like Al Capone. I don't know the specifics of this case, but this doesn't seem right. When I hear Roy, who is an absolute life force, I can't imagine a fate as unfitting as this.

That said, his career rebounded in the 1970s. He played the 1970 Monterey Jazz Festival, and both of his Route 66 releases rekindled interest in his career, leading him to do some touring in Europe before he died of a heart attack in 1981. Roy Brown, you gave us a lot. Thank you for everything.

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

BY TERRY CARLETON

Blue and Improved

With a few mods, this budget 1967 Teisco K2L lab rat became a great playing — and priceless — custom build.

IN THE MID SIXTIES, Teisco used this very stylish body shape for about five years. Known colloquially as the Sharkfin, it was offered in two-, three- and four-pickup variations, as well as with a few different color options. This particular Teisco started its life as a Sears Silvertone K2L, which came with two single-coil pickups and a vibrato.

Back in the groovy days of nearly 60 years ago, Teisco was a Japanese manufacturing juggernaut that specialized in making affordable beginner guitars to the tune of about 100,000 per year. As time went by, the company started to put out some fairly decent guitars that sported professional features, like truss rods, multiple pickups, carved tops, fancy finishes (including a Candy Apple Red) and hip striped pickguards. But compared to their American and European counterparts, they were still quite affordable. For this reason, these higher quality Teiscos frequently became lab rats for the DIY-ers who wanted to experiment by changing out pickups, pots, tuners, bridges and the like. This guitar suffered that very fate until my friend Ardy brought it back to its former glory, and beyond!

WEIRDO FACTOR

The color scheme is what stands out most in this rebuild. Many shades of blue were employed, starting with the blue Croco finish on the body and headstock. Notice the reshaped headstock and plastic overlays, which further the whole Teisco vibe. The pickguard had to be partially refabricated, not only to accommodate the two new humbuckers, which are covered by thin pieces of lenticular blue satin flame, but also to cover up what had turned out to be an unfortunate routing job by the previous DIY-er.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

I own two original K2Ls, and I will venture to say this is the best-playing and best-sounding example I've ever encountered. Ardy replaced the original trashed neck with a 21-fret Mighty Mite maple neck with rosewood fingerboard. Simply put, it plays more like a modern guitar. It's very Strat-like and has a wonderful familiarity about it.

The top two slider buttons — which appear to be in the strum path but don't actually get in my way — are kill switches for each pickup; the third slider is a global non-active lead boost. The controls include dedicated volume knobs for each pickup and a global tone.

Situated just to the right of the neck pickup, the three-way switch selects coil-tap and phase options. Also of note, this custom job utilizes a hardtail bridge set-up with strings through the body, an option that the K2L didn't offer. As such, the sustain and intonation are solid. The sound of this guitar falls somewhere between Gibson and Fender, but with the different tonal options, it really stretches out to being an extremely versatile and modern guitar, worthy of just about any musical style.

VALUE

The original K2L sold new for just over $50. It can fetch up to $1,500 in stock condition, but plenty of beat-up examples sell for $100 to $200. As for mine, it's a total player, with a kind of future-primitive vibe. It's hard to put a monetary value on it, but even with all the mods and new parts, I spent less than I would have for a vintage one.

WHY IT RULES

It's got the look. This body shape remains one of Teisco's more popular, but in the larger sense, it is still underground. Plus, it's lightweight, comfortable to play and sounds great! Huge kudos going out to Ardy for such a cool build.

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it.

PHOTOS BY MAY YAM

SOME KIND OF MONSTER

Kirk Hammett set out to write background music. Instead, he created the four horror movie–themed guitar instrumentals that make up his debut solo effort, Portals.

BY ELLIE ROGERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY SAFFER

AS LEAD GUITARIST of one of the biggest-selling bands in history, Kirk Hammett needs little in the way of an introduction. While Metallica have been teasing fans with the promise of a new album since last summer, Hammett has emerged as the first band member to step from the mothership and fly solo with his new four-track horror movie-influenced EP, *Portals*.

Originally conceived as background music to accompany his *It's Alive!* exhibition of horror-flick posters and memorabilia, the self-produced *Portals*, as Hammett explains, evolved to become a collection of "soundtracks to the movies in your mind." The EP contains four high-concept instrumental tracks: "Maiden and the Monster," "The Jinn," "High Plains Drifter" and "The Incantation," each inspired by a different era in horror movie history. The latter two tracks were co-written by conductor Edwin Outwater, whom Hammett met while working on Metallica's 2020 live release, *S&M2*. Outwater leads orchestral players from the Los Angeles Philharmonic to give *Portals* its baroque-meets-metal aesthetic.

"I DISCOVERED PROG THREE OR FOUR YEARS AGO. I CAN'T BELIEVE I MISSED OUT ON SO MANY GREAT ALBUMS!"
"WHITE ZOMBIE"
BELA (DRACULA) LUGOSI
VICTOR and EDWARD HALPERIN PRODUCTION
RELEASED BY UNITED ARTISTS

KEVIN NIXON

Speaking from his home in San Francisco, Hammett discussed the origins of his new music and his go-to gear for these new recordings. And tellingly, he dropped a hint about the next Metallica album.

How did *Portals* come about?
The first couple of songs — "Maiden and the Monster" and "The Jinn" — were my attempt to write background music for my museum show of horror movie posters. Then I met Edwin Outwater. He's a big horror fan as well, so I said, "Let's collaborate on something and make it horror movie–influenced and cinematic." That's where "High Plains Drifter" and "The Incantation" came from. It's funny: I have these four pieces of music, and I still don't have any background music for the exhibition. I just realized that!

Which came first, your love of guitar or your love of horror?
They both happened around the same time. I saw my first horror movie when I was five years old. It was *The Day of the Triffids*. Also, I remember, at four or five years old, being aware of music and the radio, and my sister going around singing Beatles songs. So I think they both kind of crystallized inside of me around the same time. When I was 15, I got hold of a guitar and acted upon another love of mine that is just as intense as horror movies, and it became another obsession. It was a natural progression for me to bring the two together. My first attempts at that were designing these guitars with horror movie posters on them, like my Mummy, Frankenstein, Dracula and Nosferatu guitars. That was a cool way of bringing the two genres together, and it occurred to me that I could do the same thing musically. The first thing I played was the arpeggiated part in "Maiden and the Monster." It's a C♯minor 7 chord going chromatically from C♯ to C major 7 to B5 and back to C major 7. Everything came out of that simple progression.

What were your main musical influences for *Portals*?

I've been listening to a ton of classical music for what seems like forever. I just love it. One of my favorite things to do is sit down and listen to a piece of classical music and pretend every instrument is the electric guitar, and it's amazing how everything kind of changes. So classical music has been a big influence on me. Also prog. I discovered it three or four years ago and, oh my god, I can't believe that I missed out on so many great prog albums all this time! I can definitely see a line where late '60s and early '70s prog is really instrumental in influencing hard rock and heavy metal.

What did you want to get out of working with players from the L.A. Philharmonic?
The timbre of classical music, to me, is so beautiful. There's a completely different color that's found in so many different ways with classical instruments. A cello through a P.A. might be one of the heaviest things I've ever heard in my life. I wanted to really take advantage of that and exploit that in these tunes.

How did writing instrumental music change your approach?
It was great that I was able to get out of that structure of riff, verse, chorus, huge middle part, then back to the riff, verse and chorus. I'm glad I was free to go

Onstage with Metallica at the Sonisphere festival, Warsaw, Poland, June 16, 2010

wherever the music wanted to go. The process was a lot simpler and a lot smoother than I expected it to be, and it sounds a lot more complicated than it was to make or record. And that really is a beautiful thing.

Back in the day, you took lessons with Joe Satriani, the godfather of narrative instrumental rock. Did any of his words of wisdom come flooding back when you were making *Portals*?
Joe's influence is just in me. It's part of my guitar style because he showed me all these different exercises. He showed me modal thinking and music theory, how to get melodies out of certain chords and how to make chords out of certain melodies. That stuff is still with me to this day and will always be a part of me because it's intrinsic to the way I express myself. I'm so grateful to Joe for giving me those tools.

But when it came to this album, I purposely stayed away from his approach, which is more traditional. When Joe started putting out albums, he created a template that a lot of other guitarists copied, and that's great. I'm not knocking that. But I just wanted to do something different that's never been done before.

Which of your guitars did you use on the EP?
I used Greeny, of course [*the Les Paul named after its former owner, Peter Green, and later owned by Gary Moore*]. Then I used my natural-finish ESP Ouija guitar for a lot of the cleaner stuff, and an Olympic White 1964 Fender Strat for some of the arpeggiated stuff. I used a Teuffel Tesla guitar, which is a guitar made by Ulrich Teuffel in Germany. He makes amazing guitars. That guitar is very unusual and it's not really something I play a lot, but I love his guitars and what they do. The Tesla has a lot of things I don't usually use, including a Kahler [*vibrato*] and a kill switch. I used that on "The Incantation," with the E dropped to D. I also used a Fender Acoustasonic Strat — I'm so pleased with those — and a Martin D-28.

Is that a sitar we hear on "The Incantation"?
Yeah! I bought a cheap Danelectro sitar for five hundred bucks and played it on the demo. When it came time to record the actual track, I said to my equipment guy, "Send me down that sitar," but he sent my Coral Electric Sitar from the '60s that I'd used on "Wherever I May Roam" [*from 1991's* Metallica]. That was the fancy sitar. I didn't mean to use it, but it came down, so I did.

> "I'LL LISTEN TO A PIECE OF CLASSICAL MUSIC AND PRETEND EVERY INSTRUMENT IS THE ELECTRIC GUITAR"

What about other gear?
Amp-wise, I used a Mesa/Boogie Triple Crown. It's a model Boogie made for a hot second. I used that in conjunction with a 1974 Model Marshall "Plexi" from, like, 1969. I rented it. That Plexi is well known in L.A. and makes the rounds through all the studios, but I blended it with the Boogie to get a different sound. And, of course, I used my wah pedal [*Dunlop KH95*]. I also used a Boss Chorus pedal, which is something I don't really use a lot. On "High Plains Drifter" I played a Gretsch with a Fender Deluxe and a Rotovibe. That Deluxe was from 1954 or something. I call it the Phantom because it's so ugly, but it sounds amazing!

After working as part of a unit for so long, what's it been like to head out in your own creative direction?
It's something that I've been living with for a long time. You know, I have this whole other side of my musical personality, but I've never had a real platform to express it. Now I do and I'm really happy about that.

It's pretty weird because, usually at this point with an album release, it's not just me — it's the four of us, and we have each other's backs and we're supporting each other. But this time, taking it all on by myself, I feel a little bit naked and a little bit insecure. When I'm feeling that way, I take a step back and say, "It's okay to believe in the music," and that gets me through those feelings of self-doubt.

Is soundtrack work something we'll see you do more of?
That's pretty much in the cards, and it's pretty much a given for the future. I was active during COVID, writing a ton of different types of music. I wrote Metallica music, I wrote the *Portals* music — all different types of music that I'm sitting on, and it's a lot of varied stuff. I can safely say I'm not done writing this type of music because I really enjoy it, and it feels different.

Do you have an update on when we can expect a new Metallica album?
Well, let's just say that over the COVID years, we weren't just sitting around. We've been working through the lost years, so you can draw your own conclusions from that!

WRITTEN AND RECORDED PIECEMEAL ON DAYS OFF BETWEEN GIGS, *CLOSE TO THE EDGE* COALESCED INTO A PROG-ROCK MASTERPIECE. ON THE ALBUM'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY, STEVE HOWE REVEALS HOW YES CREATED THEIR GREATEST TRIUMPH.

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTYN J ADELMAN

LIVING ON

Yes mixing *Close to the Edge* at Advision Studios, London, with producer Eddy Offord and new arrival Alan White, July 1972. (from left) Rick Wakeman, Chris Squire, White, Offord, Steve Howe and Jon Anderson

THE *EDGE*

"IT WAS A REALLY great time in our lives," Steve Howe says, recalling the spring of 1972. His band, Yes, had hit the upper regions of the U.K. charts with their fourth album, *Fragile*, and much to their surprise, they did even better in the States. Tours were sold out, the venues were getting bigger, and FM stations were spinning the album tracks "Roundabout" and "Long Distance Runaround." As their unbroken, six-month string of concert dates began to wind down and they considered their next recording, the group felt as if they had the wind at their backs.

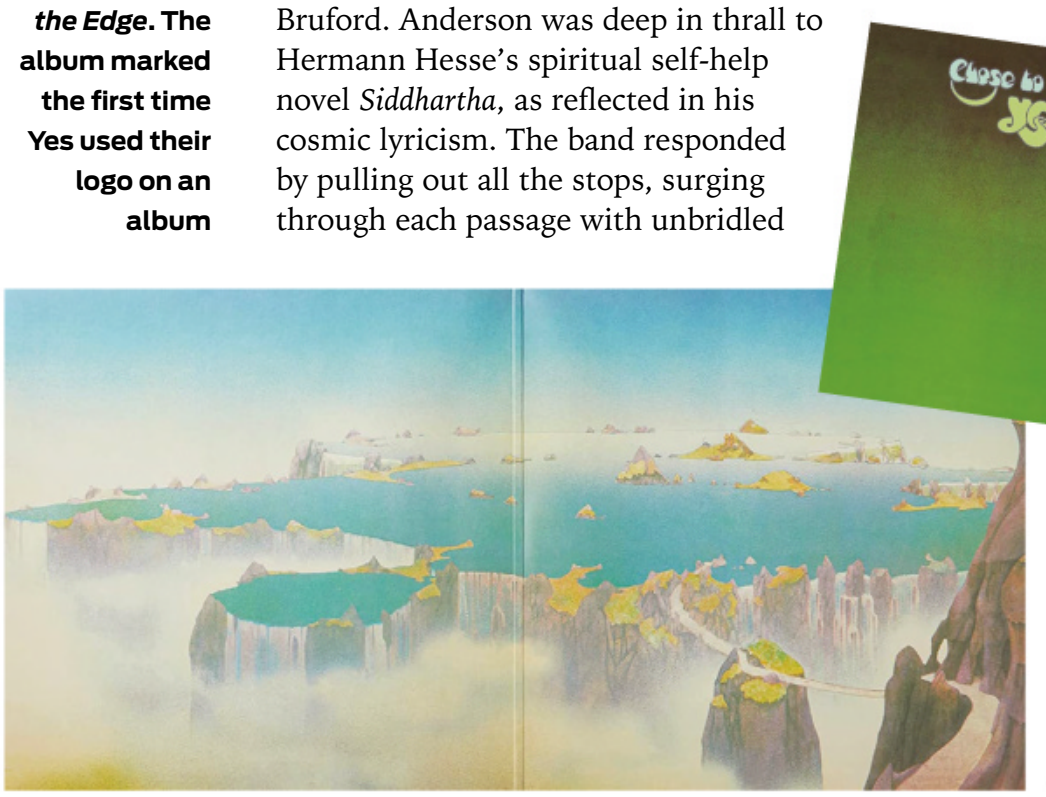
"Our spirits were very high," Howe says. "We were young, enthusiastic and adventurous, and we had this incredible breakthrough success with *Fragile*. We saw our next album as a real opportunity to prove our worth as a band. The door had been opened and we weren't going to go backward. We wanted to sharpen our skills as far as writing and arranging. Concerts come and go, but a record is forever. I think we all had a sense that whatever we did next, it had to feel like some sort of definitive statement. A record like this was destined to be made, and we wanted to be the ones making it."

Vast, enigmatic, full of moments of spectacular grandeur and ever-changing hues, *Close to the Edge* is the *Lawrence of Arabia* of progressive-rock albums. Comprised of just three tracks — the dizzying side-long, 18-minute title track, the equally sprawling mini epic "And You and I," and the whacked-out, hyperactive jazz-funk album closer "Siberian Khatru" — *Close to the Edge* documented Yes operating at the peak of their musical powers. At that point, the group consisted of Howe, singer Jon Anderson, bassist Chris Squire, keyboardist Rick Wakeman and drummer Bill Bruford. Anderson was deep in thrall to Hermann Hesse's spiritual self-help novel *Siddhartha*, as reflected in his cosmic lyricism. The band responded by pulling out all the stops, surging through each passage with unbridled zeal and relentless creativity. For Howe, the widescreen canvas afforded him the opportunity to exhaust his wily eclecticism. One minute he's unfurling gnashing, Hendrix-like riffs, the next he's basking in elegant acoustic serenity. Each track yielded moments of meticulous plotting or go-for-broke improvisation. For a divine example of the latter, his nearly three-minute album-opening blitz is an epochal art-rock masterstroke. As definitive statements go, his playing on *Close to the Edge* checks all the boxes.

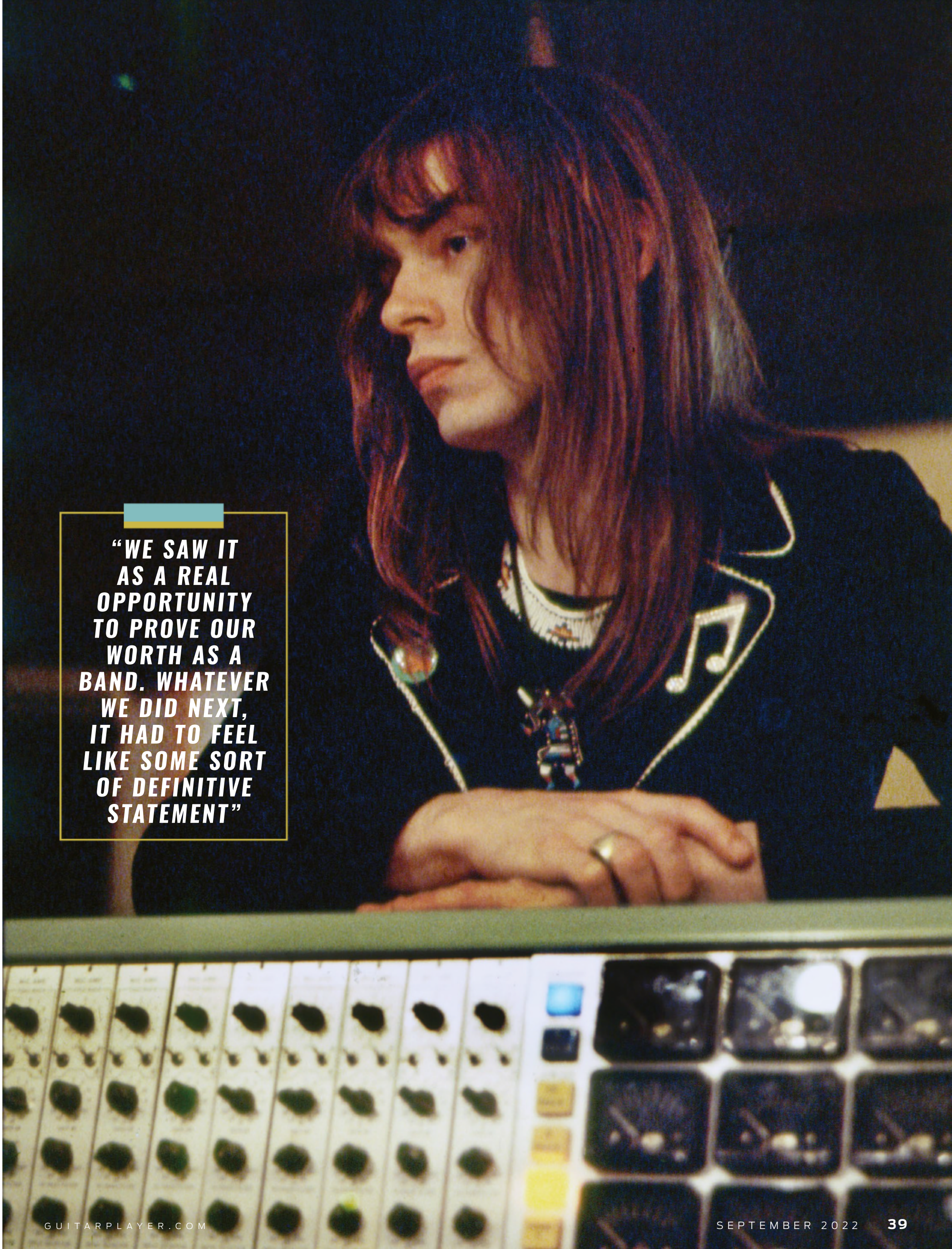
"We were quite fortunate in that we could do whatever we wanted," Howe recalls. "We didn't really have any kind of outside pressure to follow up a hit. I think, fundamentally, we were helped by the fact that Yes wasn't a singles band. Obviously, 'Roundabout' launched our previous album, and that was all well and good, but we seemed to disregard that fact. Yes were now established, and we felt like *Close to the Edge* didn't need a single. If we wanted to do a 10-minute song or even something that was longer, we could do it. And as it turned out, there were stations, particularly in America, that would play the longer songs. We lucked out."

Close to the Edge marked the second consecutive album on which the band lineup remained unchanged, but shortly after the recording sessions finished, Bruford announced that he was leaving to join King Crimson. "We were all taken aback, obviously," Howe says. "Up until it happened, we felt as if things were pretty solid among all of us. Bill left mainly because of his conflicts — or should I say challenging times — with Chris wanting him to dot every bass beat with the bass drum or something. Bill had his principles and his musical taste that he wouldn't revert from, so he left." Bruford, for his part, compared the jigsaw-like process of making *Close to the Edge* to "climbing Mount Everest." His replacement, Alan White, stepped in with little time to prepare. [*Sadly, White died on May 26, 2022, shortly after our interview with Howe.*] "Fortunately for us, Alan White was on the scene and was already hanging around," Howe explains. "He joined us in the nick of time, as we had a tour to start." That trek, a mammoth nine-month stint across North America, the United Kingdom, Japan and Australasia, would be documented in the triple-LP *Yessongs*, released in May 1973. "All in all," Howe declares, "we were quite lucky."

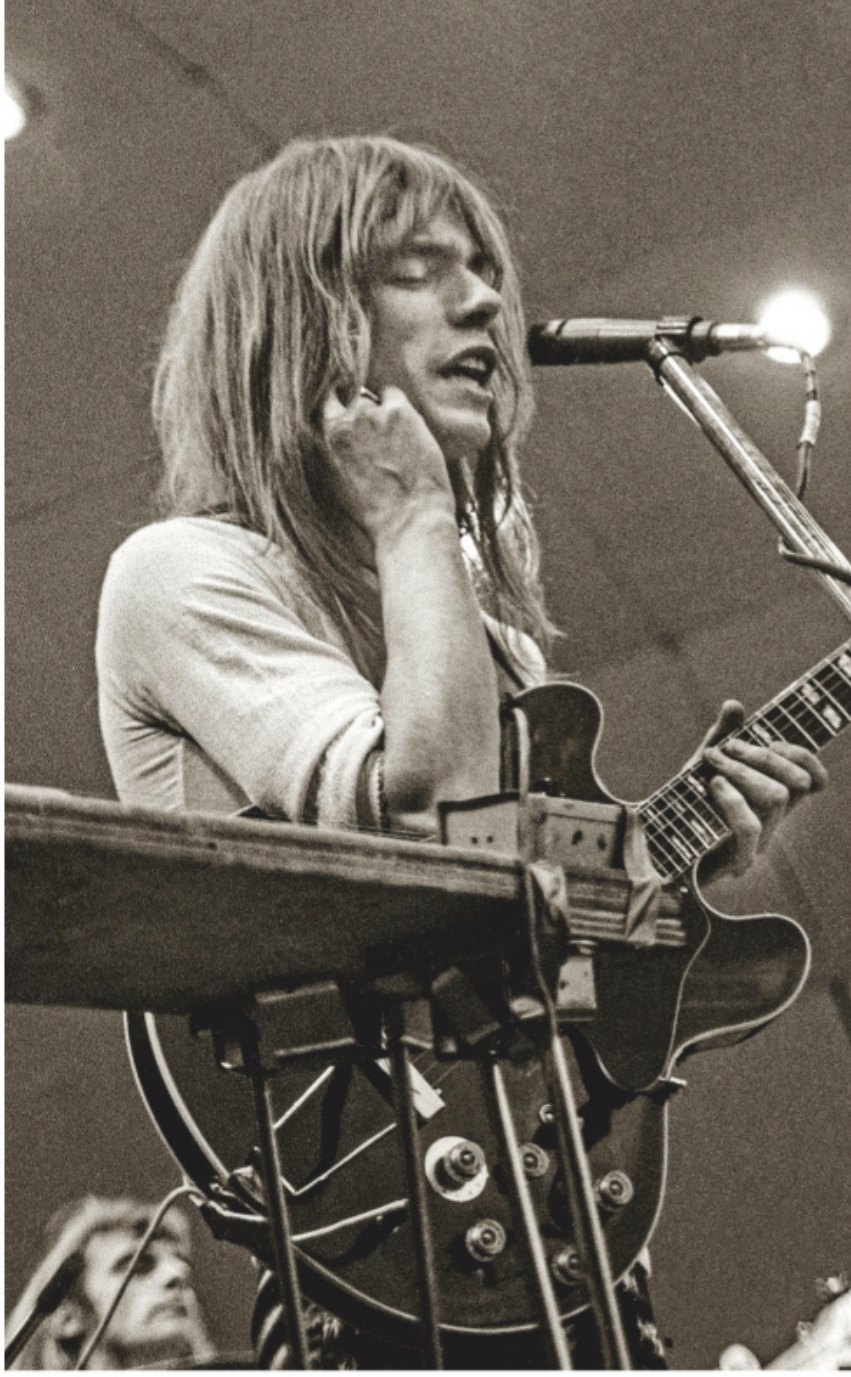
Despite its lack of an obvious single, *Close to the Edge* bested its predecessor on the charts and received almost unanimous raves from critics (even the *NME*, issuing a somewhat mixed assessment, concluded



OPPOSITE: Howe at Advision during the making of *Close to the Edge*. BELOW: The Roger Dean–designed cover and inner gatefold for *Close to the Edge*. The album marked the first time Yes used their logo on an album



> **“WE SAW IT AS A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE OUR WORTH AS A BAND. WHATEVER WE DID NEXT, IT HAD TO FEEL LIKE SOME SORT OF DEFINITIVE STATEMENT”**



that "on every level but the ordinary aesthetic one, it's one of the most remarkable records pop has yet produced"). Over the decades, the album has grown in stature among critics and musicians alike, and it's now generally regarded as a classic. It routinely tops progressive-rock polls and has been cited by guitarists like John Petrucci, Steve Stevens and John Frusciante as a major influence.

"WE ONLY HAD BLOCKS OF DAYS, NOT WEEKS OR MONTHS. WE WOULD DO SHOWS, AND IT DIDN'T LEAVE A LOT OF TIME FOR THE STUDIO"

In a recent interview, Wakeman called it the band's finest album, and Howe agrees. "It's got all the attributes a timeless record should have," he notes. "It's interesting, challenging and exciting. It was certainly interesting and challenging to make, and dare I say, I think we broke new ground. You never know how something is going to be perceived as you're recording an album. You might think that it's going to be a landmark, but there's just no way to judge that in the moment. You just do your best and hope for the best. So 50 years on, it's incredible to see the long life it's had. I hear other musicians say nice things about it, and to see it being voted best prog album of all time, it's all very delightful."

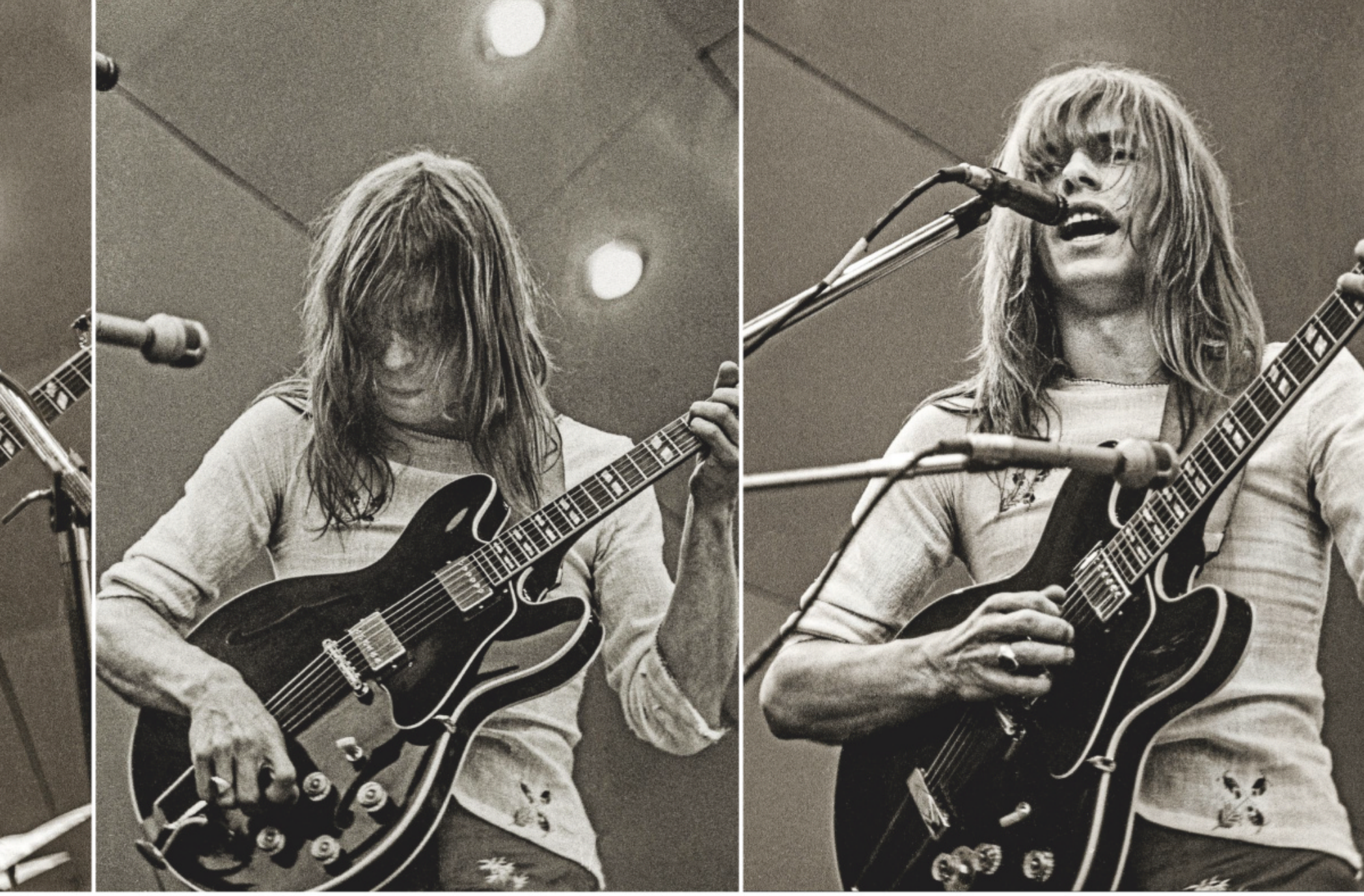
(from left) Howe, Anderson and Bill Bruford at the Rainbow Theatre, London, January 14, 1972

Before recording *Close to the Edge*, Yes had toured with the Mahavishnu Orchestra. I understand seeing them had a big impact on you and Jon Anderson.
Oh, yes, but for me it started in the early '60s. John McLaughlin was playing beautifully with Herbie Goins and the Night Timers. He had his amp on a stool, which I then started doing — I wanted it at ear level. With Herbie Goins, John was having fun being a really creative guitarist, but he hadn't yet found his style. He found that with Mahavishnu and went on to greater things.

Anyway, Yes had done some shows with the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Jon and I were knocked away; we felt they were the most remarkable band since the Beatles. They were totally different, and nobody can really top the Beatles, but as far as pure musicality goes, Mahavishnu was just so impressive. That's why *Close to the Edge* starts with a kind of manic presentation. You wouldn't expect a song or album ranting and blaring away for three or four minutes.

***The Fragile* tour was quite extensive and continued for the first month or two that you were recording *Close to the Edge*. How much actual writing time did you have before going into the studio?**
There was a bit. Jon and I established a pattern for writing and arranging together. It started with *The Yes Album* and into *Fragile*, where we discovered that one guy presenting a song could get knocked down very easily. But two guys? Much harder. We did have an awful lot of *Close to the Edge* arranged — parts of "Siberian Khatru" and then "And You and I." Of course, a lot of credit goes to the general collective of the arranging style of the members of Yes when we were together. Jon and I had the imagination that things would project further than our little cassette once we got in the studio with everybody.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



Onstage at the Crystal Palace Garden Party, London, with his Gibson ES-345, during the *Close to the Edge* tour, September 2, 1972

DICK BARNATT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

You did a bit of preproduction. Were the tunes fully fleshed out before going into Advision Studios?
Not fully. We had our crude cassettes of ideas. I remember we went to rehearse in this dance ballroom — the Una Billings School of Dance in Shepherd's Bush. We'd go in for afternoons. Bill wasn't involved in arranging as much as Chris, Rick and me, and Jon, of course. We were trying to find how to play these tunes and how we go from one to another. We were developing them together. The rehearsal period was fairly intense. We came out of it with mockups of sections of the music, if not parts of all of it.

Some of the inventive arrangements came about in the studio. What I mean is, they became clearer to us in the studio. We'd figure out how to improve them. It would have been a waste of time and money to go into the studio saying, "Okay, we're going to start Jon and Steve's song 'Close to the Edge.'" We would have been there forever. We only had blocks of days, not weeks or months. We would do shows and go back into the studio. I suppose our manager was trying to get his commission, so we kept getting put back out on the road. It didn't leave a lot of time for the studio.

Obviously, the band did a lot of overdubbing.
Of course. We did an awful lot of overdubbing when we cut tracks. There was a lot of creativity on the part of Chris. He always liked to improvise, as did Rick, but he wanted structure around those improvisations. And he was right — there is a structure that you need so that somebody can then improvise. That was the key to a lot of Chris's rather ponderous and slow approach to coming up with his final bass parts, because he was always thinking, Well, I've got to commit to this. And Bill was like, I've got to commit, too, so let's get on with it!

Yes had been working with Eddy Offord as engineer and co-producer for a number of years. He seemed to juggle his time between your band and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. What made him the go-to guy?
He had been engineering the band before I arrived. On *The Yes Album*, we chose him to co-produce because we felt confident and comfortable with him. He had a strong personality, but he could be fun. Actually, you mention ELP — they might say that we stole him from them. [*laughs*] When it came down to the actual hard work, he was very good. If Jon was doing guide vocals in a booth, Eddy would say, "That was a good take, but you went wrong here," or "I think you could do it better there." He was our go-to opinion. He held that gauntlet in his hand, but he never abused it. He always got the best of us.

Eddy was also very good with his editing. We would have different takes, and choosing which one worked best took skill and the right set of ears. Also remember, he was editing on tape — you literally had to cut them and splice them together. That's a skill, and Eddy was great at it. If he had been a rubbish editor, he probably wouldn't have lasted with us.

All hands on deck: Mixing *Close to the Edge* was, like all things in Yes, a group experience

Your opening guitar solo of the album's title track is quite remarkable. Was it an improvised, one-take deal or planned out?

What I opened with [*he sings the part*], that was a structure that I used another guitar to harmonize with, but once it goes to the next part [*he sings again*], that's an improvised take. There are so many meters, either 16 or 32 bars, and we knew we were going to do them. Those breaks had to be strategically placed in our minds. I think of myself as a composer in a way, but a lot of my music is improvised.

> **"PLAYING A NEW GUITAR ON AN ALBUM WAS EXCITING. THE GUITAR WOULD FEEL FRESH IN MY HANDS, AND IT MADE ME EXCEL IN A NEW WAY"**

Which guitar did you use on that opening solo?

Around that time, I did a strings advert for Gibson guitars, and they said, "We'll give you a guitar." And I said, "Well, I've always wanted an ES-345, with stereo wiring," so they gave me one, and I plugged into two Fender Dual Showmans — or it might have been one Dual Showman and another Fender amp.

That guitar became the *Close to the Edge* model, really. I liked to feature a new guitar on an album. On *The Yes Album*, it was the Gibson ES-175, and on *Fragile* I played the ES-5 Switchmaster. Playing a new guitar on an album was exciting. The guitar would feel fresh in my hands, and it made me excel in a new way.

You used a descending guitar line from one of your old songs called "Black Leather Gloves" for the "Total Mass Retain" section.

Well, yes. That's a reference to my old band, Bodast. We had recorded an album, but it went down the tubes and disappeared completely. The label folded and didn't put the record out. So I said, "Well, some of these riffs are quite good. I'll throw them at Yes and see if they like them." Some of my riffing came from that album, as it did with the "Würm" part of "Starship Trooper." It was like a tribute to that band. The music came back, and I was proud to re-use it.

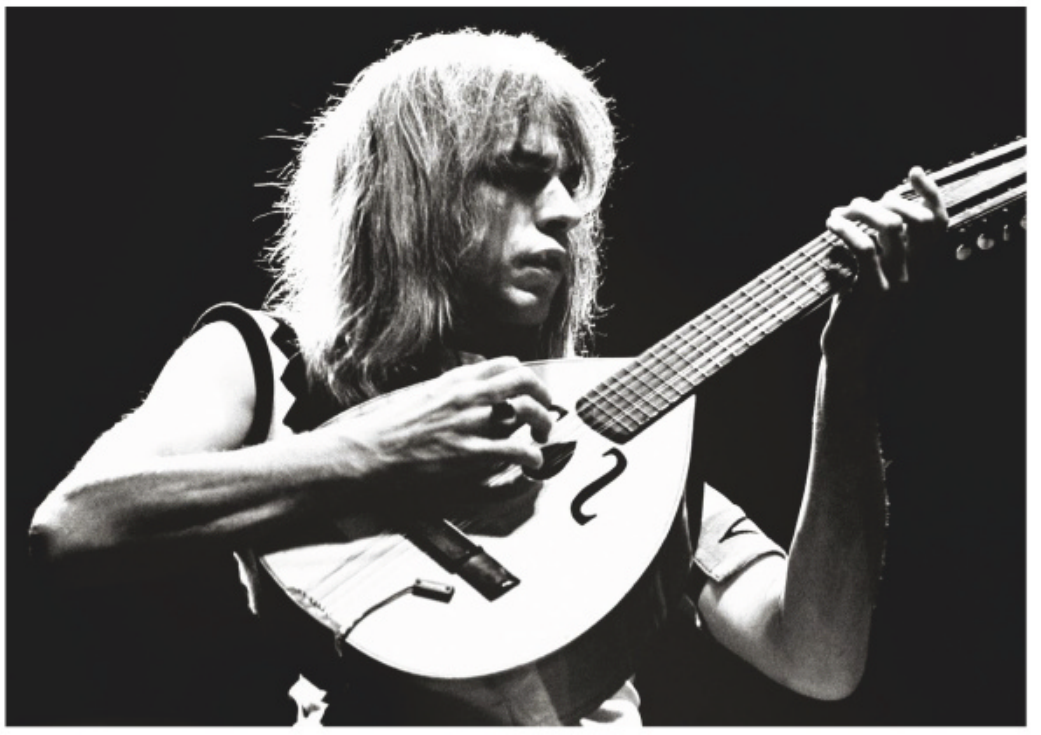
Your singing on the album is extraordinary. The way you harmonize with Jon, particularly on the "I Get Up, I Get Down" section — he's talked about how influenced he was by the Beach Boys and the Association. Did those bands impact you, as well?

I didn't quite know the Association myself, but I certainly knew and loved the Beach Boys — not that I thought for a minute that Yes sounded anything like them. Actually, I hadn't sung in public or on records until I joined Yes, but on *The Yes Album* there were harmonies that I could perform in my sort of naïve, untrained way. I could sing low stuff quite easily. I was a bit nervous and was sort of bluffing a bit, but in a strange way, once I started, it all happened quite fast. I think I benefitted from my not knowing the rules. So it's been nice: Over the years, I've had more and more comments from people who like the sound of my voice.

This 1970 Gibson ES-345 was Steve Howe's main electric guitar on *Close to the Edge*. Its original tailpiece was swapped for one from a Gibson Byrdland. The acoustic shown at bottom left is his 1953 Martin 00-18, which was the main acoustic guitar used for the recording of *Close to the Edge*.

JOSEPH BRANSTON (00-18); ADAM GASSON (ES-345)

What kind of acoustic guitar did you use on the "Cord of Life" section of "And You and I"?
The main guitar I used was a Martin 00-18 that I bought in 1968, which is the best flattop acoustic I've ever had, even though I now use a Martin MC-38 Steve Howe model. Because of the cutaway, I'm much happier on that guitar. I had the 00-18, but I also used a beautiful Guild 12-string that Chris Squire had owned. I was very tempted to buy it. I think I did buy one in the end.



Performing with a lute onstage at Wembley Empire Pool

There were those ones, and actually, now that I think of it, here and there I did some overdubbing with a Gibson what's called an FDH. It's a very rare guitar that came to England under the Francis, Day and Hunter [*FDH*] emblem. It's a guitar I still love. It's the second Gibson I ever bought — it cost me 50 quid. It's basically a big archtop guitar, a little bigger than a 175. I still love that guitar. I'll give you a scoop, in fact: Chris actually tracked with that guitar. His bass on "Roundabout" was actually tracked with the FDH with a pickup on it.

How did you come up with that pedal-steel part in the "Eclipse" section? Are you using distortion and delay on it?
Probably. But it wasn't a pedal steel; it was a lap steel, or a Hawaiian steel — call it what you like. Nowadays I only play steels with legs because I like the guitar to be rigid, and then I can play well. If it's on my lap, it's hopeless, because I'm working a volume pedal as well.

At the time, I was just sort of learning about the lap steel and its possibilities. By the time of "Going for the One" [*1977*], I played that whole song on a steel. I'd really worked on my steel playing after *Close to the Edge*.

"Siberian Khatru" features a riff that's pretty much the basis for the song. How did that come about?
Well, there's two riffs, really. There's the part [*he sings*] that I play for probably half of the song. I'm playing that with some different approaches, sometimes with a Leslie guitar, sometimes moving octaves around. Basically, that was one of Bill's gems. He brought that in. It was a knockout to have that riff. I adopted it, I loved it, I played it. It's a fundamental part of the song.

But the other riff — sometimes Bill would do this if he wasn't sure how to finish a line: He'd just mouth something, like a scat singer. That happened on several occasions on those first three albums. Bill was remarkable like that. I don't think he realizes how much he contributed. But in the spirit of the arranging of Yes, it was the giving and taking of ideas, and we were really fluid with that.

You played two solos in the song, the second of which, the clean solo, you recorded without hearing what you were doing, as I understand.
That's right, yeah. We didn't often record guitars with me standing in the big studio. I liked being in the control room, where I could really hear the music. I'd done some solos, but I didn't like them. They just weren't doing much for me. I had the 345 all set up and I was going to tape, and I said, "Let's try one without listening." Everybody thought, He's gone mad. But okay, do that.

I played, and I didn't even realize what I'd done, but I could see it in my mind. It was a different way of playing. When we listened back, I went, "Okay, I like that." Everybody else liked it, too. It was an eye-opener for me, because I don't know that I would have ever played like that if I'd heard what I was doing. I truly didn't know where I was going at the time. By not hearing it and just thinking about my fingerboard and my positionings, it came out quite good. I was delighted.

Alan White joined the band three days before the tour to support the album began. What happened there?
It happened quickly. I mean, Aynsley Dunbar was pretty unhappy that I didn't invite him. We were pally and we'd played together on a few recordings in the studio. I loved his drumming. When it was announced that Alan got the job, Ansley said, "Why didn't you give me a call? I would have come down." But that wouldn't have made any difference, because Alan was in the circle of people that we knew. He was friendly with Eddy Offord, and he was hanging out in the studio. He may have even jammed on Bill's drums for a laugh here and there. Basically, we looked around

GUS STEWART/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

> “EVEN THOUGH WE KNEW THE SONGS, WE HADN’T ACTUALLY PLAYED THEM LIVE OURSELVES. IT WAS A REMARKABLE LEARNING CURVE”

and thought, Oh, Bill wants to leave — Alan’s already here; why not ask him? His reputation was such that we could ask him, and he said yeah.

How many rehearsals did you have with Alan before the tour? I’m guessing not many.

[*laughs*] Well, I wouldn’t think no more than a couple. I don’t know how it’s possible that he got onstage after having two or three days to learn the album. We did put him through it, you know what I mean? I mean, even though we knew the songs, we hadn’t actually played them live ourselves. It was a remarkable learning curve. How anybody could come in and play *Close to the Edge*, let alone anything else that takes the highest level of technical and musical skill — it wasn’t an easy gig to step into, but Alan did his best to listen and practice. He tried a bit of this and a bit of that. We asked him to get it right as much as he could. And he did.

Previously, Yes played theaters and big clubs; even on the *Fragile* tour you played the Whisky in L.A. But you moved to arenas on the *Close to the Edge* tour.

There had been a bit of time when we could tolerate those places — it felt like when I was playing gigs in England in the ’60s. But the Whisky… I’m cautious to say it was an awful place, but in a way it wasn’t really suitable for a band like ours. However, everybody played there, and I think its reputation preceded its reality. It was a place to be seen at — a place to add to the list of venues you’ve played. From the Whisky we made the jump to the Hollywood Bowl. We had played as a support band for several years in America. One night we played with Jethro Tull, the next night it was Grand Funk Railroad, and the night after that it was Mountain. We opened for acts that were on the Premier Talent roster.

Actually, the very first gig we did in America was in northern Canada. We had gone to New York and we got scared in our hotel; it was next to a fire station and all hell was breaking out from the noise. Then we went to Edmonton, Canada, for our first show with Jethro Tull. We went onstage and we were like, Oh, yeah, this is what we came for, because there was a captive audience of Jethro Tull fans. Nobody knew us hardly, but we went down really well. They liked us instantly. After that, we were unstoppable.

When you finally hit arenas, did you feel as though you were in your natural element?

Yeah, we were ready. By the time *Close to the Edge* came, we were out there on our own. I think we might have invented “the evening with” lineup, where we didn’t have an opening act. We were geared up to do a whole show of our own music. We knew our time had come, and it happened, quite remarkably.

ABOVE: Performing at Crystal Palace, London, with Alan White on drums, September 2, 1972. BELOW: Howe, photographed at home, December 7, 2017

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES (YES); JOSEPH BRANSTON (HOWE)

(from left) Porcupine Tree's Richard Barbieri, Steven Wilson and Gavin Harrison

NICK SUTTLE

AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

Following a 13-year hiatus, Porcupine Tree regroup with one less member and a broader musical palette. **Steven Wilson** explains why this is a new beginning for the progressive-rock group — or maybe the end of the road.

BY MARK McSTEA

STEVEN WILSON BRISTLES at the use of the term *prog rock* to describe his music, both as a member of Porcupine Tree and as a solo artist. But in fact, all that genre's familiar tropes are present: complex time signatures, wide-ranging stylistic shifts within songs, intricate riffing and a high degree of technical ability. Regardless of categorization, the new Porcupine Tree album, *Closure/Continuation* (Music for Nations) is as strong a record as you'll hear all year, whether it's considered from the perspective of classic rock, pop or, indeed, progressive rock.

"I PLAY BASS LIKE I WOULD PLAY THE GUITAR: I PLAY MELODIC STUFF AND I PLAY A LOT OF CHORDS AS WELL, THE THINGS A 'PROPER' BASS PLAYER PROBABLY WOULDN'T DO"

Thirteen years have passed since Porcupine Tree issued their last album, 2009's *The Incident*. In the intervening years, Wilson has pursued a highly successful solo career, collaborated with a diverse range of artists and become the go-to guy when classic rock albums need a remix. *Closure/Continuation* arrived out of the blue for fans of his work, although Wilson and the band's other two members, keyboardist Richard Barbieri and drummer Gavin Harrison, had been exchanging ideas between themselves for many years. It became clear to Wilson that what they had created was strong enough to compete with the best of his work both inside and outside of the band, and consequently, Porcupine Tree sprang their 11th album on an unsuspecting public in June 2022.

Wilson recording at AIR Studios with his Fender Custom Shop 1963 Relic Telecaster. "I always thought of guitars as tools... until I got this one," he says.

DERRICK BREMNER

Not only has Wilson been working hard on creating the songs for *Closure/Continuation* and producing the album, but he's also found the time to write his autobiography, *Limited Edition of One*. It is an honest and revealing insight into how Wilson operates, his background and how he views his place in the musical firmament. In conversation, Wilson is eloquent and voluble, and unafraid to offer an opinion which might not sit easily with fans' expectations of him. But any interview with him is all the better for his candid and forthright views.

The last Porcupine Tree album was released in 2009, and when you talk about *Closure/Continuation*, in your book, there's a suggestion that this may be the band's last album. Do you still feel that way?

The album's title reflects the fact that we're not definitively sure one way or the other. As I say in the book, it all depends on whether we think there's something different that we can do next time or if it's just going to be more of the same kind of thing. I discussed this with Richard last week when we were doing some press, and we agreed that if we could do something different, then maybe there would be scope for another album, but that's just a notion at the moment.

There's certainly nothing guaranteed. I don't think we'll tour as a band again though, once we've completed the dates that we've got planned to promote the current album.

When you were exchanging ideas with each other over the years, was that with the intention of ultimately making an album, or was it purely for the joy of creating music?

I think a bit of both. There's no reason why you can't

have joy in creativity and also have one eye on the idea that you're going to make a record. I grew up loving records and always wanting to release records, so I'm always thinking in terms of what could open side one, what could close side two. So right from the beginning, I was always thinking about those kinds of considerations. There was never any guarantee that we'd release the music though. One of the key things about what we were doing was that it was made in a complete vacuum; nobody knew that we were doing it. We didn't tell any management or record labels. The potential was always there that we might decide we hadn't created anything new and we wouldn't release it. The fact that we didn't feel that way and thought we'd made a very distinctive Porcupine Tree album was a great bonus.

One of the reasons there is a new Porcupine Tree album is that I've been able to let go of the control I've always exerted over the band, because I've now got an established solo career, and a pretty successful one. What was different about this record was that I felt able to collaborate with the guys on the songs and also able to defer a bit of the responsibility to them, and enjoy that process. I always used to feel slightly frustrated when we made the earlier records, but it was much easier for me this time. I've been able to enjoy the collaboration, and I think that is why it has come out sounding so fresh. I think this album is one of the most significant albums that I've made.

The opening track, "Harridan," which has been the first to be featured from the album, is almost the

quintessential progressive-rock song, in the truest sense of the word, given that it covers so many stylistic bases.

Yes that's exactly right. When someone asked me recently which song I'd pick to showcase the band, I said "Harridan" for the very reason you just gave. It has a bit of everything: a funk-bass opening, heavy riffing, acoustic parts, polyrhythms, an anthemic chorus and a long sprawling arrangement. All the stylistic aspects of the band are encompassed within it. That song is my idea of what progressive rock should be. Often when people think of progressive rock, it's not the kind of music that I'd like to listen to or play — it's a very old-fashioned kind of thing. The reason that it opens the record is because it is almost a manifesto for what the band is about.

"IT'S FLATTERING THAT PEOPLE THINK OF ME AS A GUITARIST, BUT SLIGHTLY AWKWARD, AS I CAN GO FOR MONTHS ON END WITHOUT PICKING UP A GUITAR"

Did you play bass on that track?

Yes, I played all the bass parts on the album. I've always been a slightly frustrated bass player, with an ego too big to be the bass player, because I want to be out there at the front. I think it goes back to my love of Chic and Donna Summer, which was very much about the great bass lines. I wrote a lot of the album with Gavin on drums, where I was coming up with bass licks first. I will happily acknowledge that I play bass kind of like I play guitar: I play melodic stuff and I play a lot of chords as well, the things a "proper" bass player probably wouldn't do. Maybe one of the reasons the record sounds different from other Porcupine Tree albums is that it was largely based on how I play bass.

In the studio with his Paul Reed Smith Angelus acoustic

You said in the book that you feel a bit of a fake doing interviews for guitar magazines. But here we are.

I know. [*laughs*] And I do a lot of them. It's very flattering that people think of me as a guitarist, but at the same time it always feels slightly awkward, as I can go for months on end without picking up a guitar until I need to play it for a song. I know that's very different from all of the proper guitarists that practice every day and have a real relationship with the instrument. I've never had that.

Who were the guitarists that inspired you?

I was never a fan of the shredding thing; I was always a fan of guitar players that would play one note and it would really touch your heart. That would obviously have been David Gilmour and Peter Green. But also, in the '80s, I grew up with a lot of post-punk music, so I loved bands like the Cocteau Twins — Robin Guthrie would play one note, and then he'd spin off into a chain of delays and reverbs and chorus effects. I loved that. I've also always loved the idea of using the guitar in a much more textural way — the shoegaze aesthetic. Robert Smith was another guitarist whose work I really enjoyed. I never listened to the shredders like Eddie Van Halen, and of course, I got into trouble when I was doing an interview just after he died and I said that his death didn't mean a lot to me because I'd never listened to his music. It wasn't that I didn't respect his abilities, only that as far as his music was concerned, it wasn't something that I ever listened to. I've always thought of the guitar as a part of the whole song.

Your own soloing is always very much a part of the song, and often hang on to a handful of notes and really get the most out of them.

Well, the reality is that I can't do it any other way. I can't do the shred thing even if I wanted to. It's not like Picasso was a brilliant painter but chose to paint in a primitive style; that's not me. Even if I could play fast, I probably wouldn't choose to do so. For me, as a songwriter, the guitar solo is an extension of what the vocal is doing. What's a vocal if it isn't the emotional heart of the song?

I've said this before, but if you wanted to communicate something to somebody with your voice, you'd speak slowly, with a lot of emotion. You wouldn't speak at 20 words a second. That doesn't communicate anything. If you play something really fast, it doesn't really convey emotion; it just reduces guitar playing to an Olympic sport. For me it's about saying one word and making it count.

How much do you work out what you're going to do ahead of recording the song?

DERRICK BREMNER

REPRO MAN

Steven Wilson reflects on his career as the record industry's hot remixer.

THOUGH SOME MIGHT consider it an enviable job, Steven Wilson says remixing rock masterpieces is "the equivalent of polishing the Sistine Chapel — that's what I feel I'm doing sometimes with these classic records." To date, he has applied his sonic elbow grease to records by King Crimson, Roxy Music, Jethro Tull, Tears for Fears, XTC and even this month's cover star, the Yes album *Close to the Edge*. Here, he reveals what happens when you're given the chance to dig into the master tapes of your favorite album for weeks. It turns out the job might not be so enviable.

You've become the go-to guy for a lot of remixes of classic rock albums. Given that it's such a huge undertaking, could you ever do it for an album that you didn't like?
I've done it a couple of times for albums where, I wouldn't say that I disliked them, but I certainly wasn't intimately familiar with them. I've just remixed the new Def Leppard album [Diamond Star Halos], and I wasn't a particular fan of the band beforehand — I was never really a fan of that kind of music — but coming out of the other end, I had incredible admiration for them. It's a really great album. They do that stadium-rock thing phenomenally well. Every song sounds like a radio hit. What was fun about doing the Leppard album was deconstructing and reconstructing it and hearing how they do what they do. I think I'm always going to be curious about music that I'm not that familiar with, although I think I'm probably never going to like the shredding thing. [*laughs*]

When you've completed a project, when you listen back to the album years later, do you go for the original or your remix?
The sad thing is that, by the time I've finished working on it, I never want to hear it again. [*laughs*] I've been doing it for 10 years now and I still haven't reached the stage where I want to go back and listen to anything that I've remixed. A lot of them were previously my favorite albums, so that's a real downside to what I've done. I'm certainly not trying to change the essence of an album or people's memories when I do a remix; it's more about restoration. Obviously, that doesn't apply when it's a new record, such as the Def Leppard album. The interesting thing about remixing is that the fans who've been listening to these albums for decades know them much better than the artists who recorded them. Often, the artists haven't really listened to one of their old albums for many years. It's the same for me — I rarely listen to anything I've recorded in the past.

Onstage at Be Prog! My Friend music festival in Barcelona, July 2, 2016

I do the Gilmour thing: I improvise a lot, then I comp the best parts, like he did on the "Comfortably Numb" solo. I find the best parts from each pass and comp them together. I don't always know what I'm doing beyond having an instinct for what the feel should be. Sometimes I'll look at the final comp and think that I could play that all the way through again and re-record it, which can sound a little more fluid.

When it comes to writing songs, are you actively experimenting with different time signatures, or is it part of the organic creation of the song?
I think it's a bit of both. Gavin has written books about rhythmic illusions and polyrhythms; he's really good at coming up with interesting, unusual rhythmic ideas. The songs in unusual time signatures are often based on an idea that Gavin has come up with, and then I'm presented with the "problem" of creating melodic and harmonic structures to complement what he's created, and to make it sound natural. The essence of the band has always been the combination of Gavin's distinctive rhythmic sensibilities, Richard's interesting sound design and textural approach and my singer/songwriter desire to make things into a viable song. Those are a big part of the band's DNA.

Have you ever read any of the books written about you, and was *Limited Edition of One* an attempt to put the record straight?
I've not read any of them. I feel uncomfortable about the very notion of being confronted with the way that people perceive you, the way they've interpreted what you do. After many years of so much disinformation about me on the internet, which partly arose because I'm so private and didn't go out of my way to correct inaccuracies, it became irritating to read so much that was incorrect. I think I always knew that any books written about me would be based on the stuff that's already out there. With my book, I tried to write about the things that I knew nobody knew about.

There are a lot of lists in the book: your favorite books, films, records... I found it interesting that you were a big fan of Abba and Donna Summer in your early years, and it's music that you still love now.
That was one of the reasons I wrote the book, and one of the main themes. I tried very hard to be a musician that exists outside this notion of genre, and yet the industry and fans will relentlessly try to categorize you in a particular genre. I grew up listening to everything from post-punk and industrial to disco, and I loved it all. It just so happened that one of many projects that I started when I was young was the one that took off. That was the one where I was indulging my love of '70s progressive-rock music. If it had been my band No-Man that had taken off, then I'd have been playing synth pop, or it could have been the work I was doing exploring ambient music. People would have had an entirely different perception of me if success had come from some of the other things that I loved. For better or worse, it was Porcupine Tree that took off, so now I'm the guy that does prog.

Did writing the book give you a new perspective on yourself or your career?
Yes, I learned so much about myself. I always thought my family background was pretty ordinary, but in recounting the dark things that happened to some of my relatives, I realized that some of those things were pretty fucked up. I can actually trace some of those things through my songs. In much the way that I've deconstructed and reconstructed classic albums, I was deconstructing and reconstructing myself. I've come out the other side with a better understanding of myself, and a little more contentment.

You say in the book that you often lie in interviews. How much of what we've discussed is untrue?
I don't know. [*laughs*] I talk so much that I believe my own bullshit. Sometimes I'll think back and realize I've been saying things for years that aren't true without even being aware of it at that time. I've not consciously lied to you, but who knows? Time will tell.

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MICHAEL AVEDON

The LAST *of the* SINGING COWBOYS

He tutored under Woody Guthrie and influenced a young Bob Dylan. Now 90, folk legend **Ramblin' Jack Elliott** reflects on his role in the postwar folk revival and a life spent making music.

BY MARTIN McQUADE

HIS MENTOR WAS Woody Guthrie. His protégé was Bob Dylan. Between the two of them, Ramblin' Jack Elliott has been the Johnny Appleseed of song, sowing the nation's roots music in grounds both rural and urban. Although Dylan called him "the king of folk singers," Elliott defies categorization and exemplifies genres such as cowboy, hillbilly, bluegrass, blues and rock.

He has been equally comfortable performing with Pete Seeger, Tom Waits, Flea and Beck. Homages flow from adherents such as the Rolling Stones, former members of the Grateful Dead, Bonnie Raitt, Eric Clapton and Bruce Springsteen. Among his accolades are two Grammys and the Presidential National Medal of Arts. Johnny Cash observed of Elliott, "Nobody has covered more ground. He's got a song and a friend for every mile behind him." That journey is the subject of *A Texas Ramble*, a recent documentary, and the earlier *Ballad of Ramblin' Jack*, by his daughter Aiyana. The scope extends, quoting Guthrie's anthem, "This Land Is My Land," which Elliott recorded, "from California to the New York Island/From the Redwood Forest to the Gulf Stream waters."

Now 90, this ultimate maverick long ago fulfilled the dreams he first wove in Brooklyn's Flatbush neighborhood. "Brooklyn made me want to be a cowboy. I didn't groove there very well," he says. "I always wanted to be out west in the wide-open spaces, riding horses, working cattle and singing 'Red River Valley' while picking my 12-dollar Collegiate guitar, made out of cigar boxwood. My mother bought it for me when I was 13, before I showed any interest, although I'd been listening to Gene Autry's *Melody Ranch*."

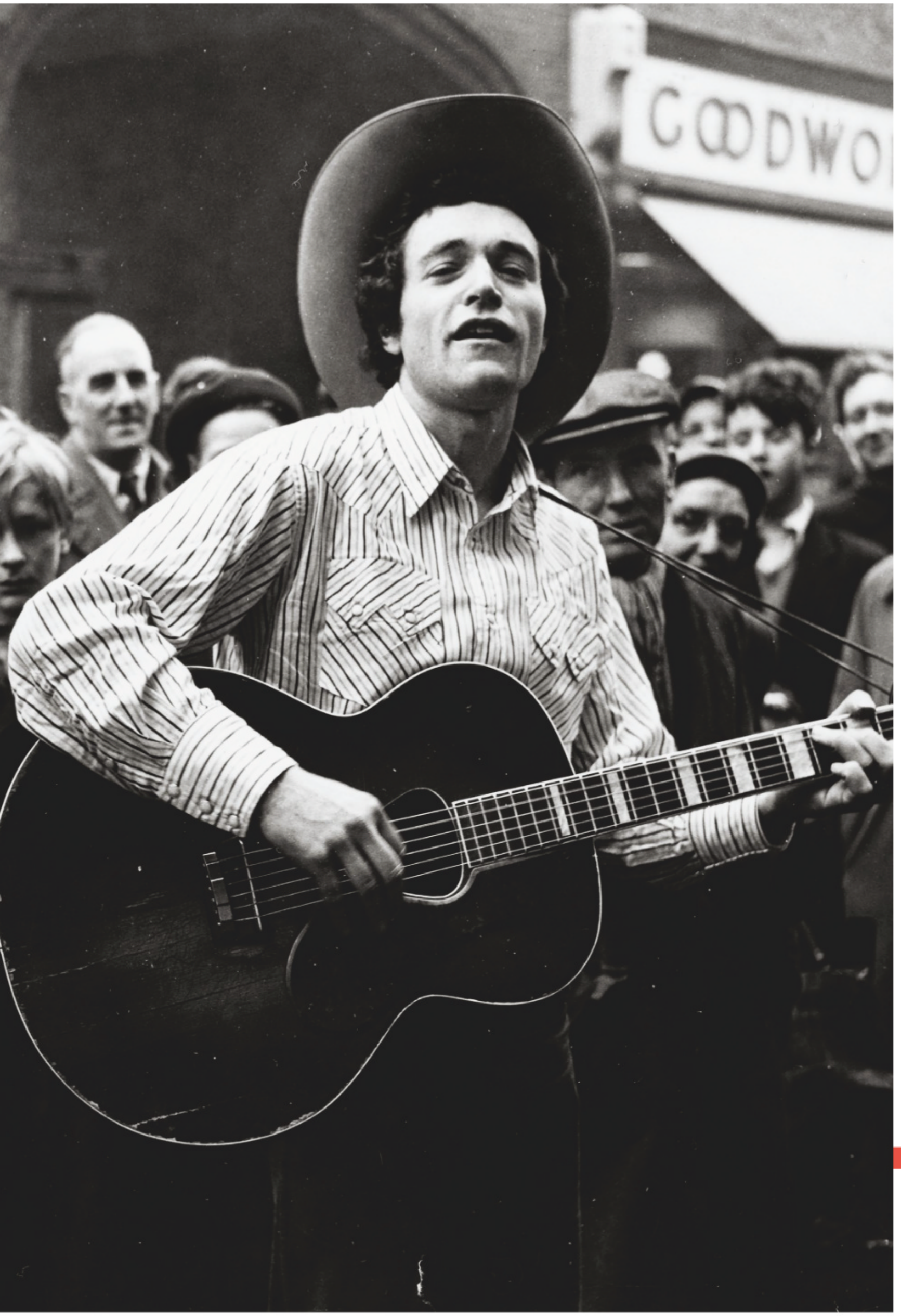
His wanderlust inspired by a friendship with a local Danish sailmaker, Elliott ran away from home with his friends, "future beatnik poets" Don Finkel and Carl Margolies, in April 1947, when he was 15. "We'd drink beer in a subterranean bar, near what became the Gaslight on MacDougal Street," he says. "I suggested we hitchhike to Chicago to hear [*trumpeter*] Bunk Johnson's jazz band." Along the way Elliott made a detour and, while passing through Washington, D.C., took a job grooming saddle horses with Jim Eskew's Ranch Rodeo and Wild West Show. "I'd sleep in a tent with 60 horses three feet from their hind feet," he says. "I was in heaven. We had a rodeo clown, Brahmer Rogers, who played hillbilly songs on guitar and banjo. I played some banjo but never got good at it."

"BROOKLYN MADE ME WANT TO BE A COWBOY. I DIDN'T GROOVE THERE VERY WELL"

Three months later he was back home, but, perhaps stirred by his time on the road, Elliott's passion for the guitar began to flourish. His old Collegiate emerged from the closet. "I'd bring it to school and played for my fellow students on the front stoop, singing cowboy songs," he recalls. "Some kids even clapped." Roy Acuff was his first singing influence, followed by Gene Autry, the Louvin Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys and Lonnie Johnson, whom Elliott would eventually meet at Gerde's Folk City in the Village in 1961. During the summers of 1947 and 1948, Elliott played in Washington Square Park with budding folk artists Tom Paley, Eric Darling, Harry Smith, Roger Sprung and Fred Gerlach. "Fred played Lead Belly songs on a 12-string guitar," he recalls. "His girlfriend was Tiny Ledbetter, Lead Belly's niece."

A turning point came in 1951 when Elliott met his kindred spirit, Woody Guthrie. "Paley gave me his phone number," he says. Guthrie invited him over before calling it off. "He said, 'Don't come today. I got a bellyache.' It turned out he had a ruptured appendix. He went right in the hospital. The first time I met him he was lying in bed. I visited Woody there two days running."

JOHN PRATT/KEYSTONE FEATURES/GETTY IMAGES



Ramblin' Jack Elliott, with his wife, June (left), performing in Stratford, London, circa 1960

By this point Elliott had acquired a slightly shopworn Gretsch guitar for $75 from a music store on lower Third Avenue. He took the guitar with him to visit Guthrie and again soon after when he and a school chum made a trek to California in the friend's Plymouth Coupe. In California, he met then-aspiring actor James Dean, the ex-boyfriend of Elliott's bride-to-be, June. "Something about Dean reminded me of Woody," he says. "Strumming along on guitar, I improvised a song, just part of our conversation. Thoughts and feelings came out about Woody being sick in the hospital. I couldn't remember it five minutes later. Even now, I don't remember how the words were or sounded. It was a moment in history."

"WOODY WAS DEVASTATINGLY SICK AND COULD BARELY SPEAK. THERE WAS THIS STRANGE KID FROM MINNESOTA VISITING HIM"

Three months later, Elliott was back in New York City and performing under the name Buck Elliott. He reconnected with Guthrie at a party in the Village. "When I arrived, Woody was in an upstairs closet tuning his guitar and warming up," he says. "He had his harmonica. They made requests. He charged five cents per, like a human jukebox. Somebody requested, 'Blue Tail Fly.' He said, 'That's a Burl Ives song. I get 15 cents extry for playing Burl.'

"Woody was playing a small-size Gibson. He was so proud owning that. He always teased me about the piece of junk my Gretsch was. Woody was hard on guitars. He'd been through several previous guitars that were full of holes, wrecked, cracked and bent." Elliott lived with Guthrie from 1951 to 1953, but performed with him only once, as a guest at a concert in Newark. "I wasn't known yet," he explains, "just Woody's sidekick."

With Stephen Stills (left) backstage at the Greek Theater in Berkeley, California, 1981

RICHARD MCCAFFREY/ MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/ GETTY IMAGES

Elliott would eventually come into his own, but he needed to do some living. It happened soon enough. "In 1953, I met Jack Kerouac, a friend of my girlfriend at the time," he says. "He'd come to her apartment and read to us his manuscript of *On the Road*. Over three days sitting on the floor and drinking six big bottles of red wine, we all took turns reading from it. That stirred my desire to hit the road myself." That summer he and a pair of friends and fellow musicians, Frank Hamilton and Guy Carawan, traveled by car from New York City to New Orleans, with his Gretsch in tow. "We performed on street corners. Farmers would take their hats off, shaking each other down, and collect money for us," he recalls. "We were meeting real hillbillies, sometimes sleeping overnight in their homes up in the Smoky Mountains. Frank was 17 and played banjo like a wizard. He later started the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago where they teach five-string banjo and guitar picking. Guy, who owned the car, was 21. He was a passionate singer who later introduced 'We Shall Overcome.'"

By the time he returned to New York City, Elliott had matured into a solid performer. "Jack sounds more like me than I do," Guthrie once declared. Although Elliott developed his own rugged strumming and picking style and plaintive approach to song, he remained a champion for his mentor and his music.

In 1961, Elliott would meet a fellow disciple 10 years his junior. "I had just gotten back from touring in Europe for six years with banjo master Derroll Adams," he says. "I took a bus to visit Woody at Greystone Park Hospital in New Jersey. Woody was devastatingly sick and could barely speak. There was this strange kid from Minnesota visiting him. He introduced himself to me as Bob Dylan." Just 19, Dylan had moved to New York City in January 1961, intent on meeting Guthrie and launching his career in the Greenwich Village folk scene. "I had about five records out on the English label Topic," Elliott recalls. "He told me he had all of them and mentioned those he liked best."

Elliott's influence on the young folk singer was evident to those who saw his early shows. "The first time I heard him perform, people in the audience poked me saying, 'He's doing your stuff. He sounds just like you,'" Elliott says. "He sounded good, but I didn't think he sounded like me at all. I appeared with Bob at Gerde's Folk City in the Village. They put up a piece of cardboard and somebody wrote, 'Now Appearing: Son of Jack Elliott.' I suppose I was a father figure to him. We played guitar and harmonica like little Woody clones."

Like Guthrie, both men racked their harmonicas in metal braces hung around their necks. "Bob would

always leave his in the upward position," Elliott says, whereas he allowed his to rest on his chest behind his guitar, where the sharp metal would invariably come into contact with his guitar and scratch off the varnish. Elliott says he grew weary of the whole enterprise. "I said, 'We sound like the Harmonica Brothers, and anyway I'm tired of scratching my guitar, so I'm gonna quit playing. Have at it, Bobby!' That's when I officially stopped playing harmonica in my shows in order to get rid of that copycat element."

When Dylan made his controversial shift to electric guitar in 1965, the folk community was appalled. Pete Seeger had witnessed the singer's electric debut at the Newport Folk Festival that year and had to be restrained from severing Dylan's guitar cable with a hatchet. "My reaction wasn't as strong as Pete Seeger's," Elliott notes. "But I could never put it into words. The new music was so different from his previous music, and I'm always shocked by anything electric. I'm not into electric gadgets, although I admire some of it. I never had an electric guitar. I never learned the real art of playing electric."

Ironically, he did play electric for Dylan. In 1975, Dylan saw Elliott perform at the Other End — then the temporary operating name of New York City's famed Bitter End folk club — and invited him to join his plan for the Rolling Thunder Revue. "He spoke about his idea of a bus tour of small venues around the country with him, Joan Baez, Bobby Neuwirth and myself," Elliott recalls. "Patti Smith was there. Bob, Patti, Bobby, and I got up on the stage and sang." A few months later, Elliott was performing at the venue again when Neuwirth showed up. "Neuwirth came to the gig and then called Bob in California," he says. "Neuwirth handed me the phone. Bob said, 'We're gonna do the tour in November starting in New York City.' I said, 'Okay.' *Bang!* Those eight seconds is how the tour began." For the stint, Elliott borrowed a Fender Telecaster from fellow performer T-Bone Burnett. "I played two songs on it with the band, one of which was Jesse Fuller's 'San Francisco Bay Blues,'" Elliott says. "I usually play that as an opener to get warmed up. The Revue also saw Elliott perform in Dylan's 1978 film

TOP: With Woody Guthrie. ABOVE: (from left) Richie Havens, Joan Baez, Elliott and Bob Dylan perform at a benefit concert for Rubin "Hurricane" Carter in 1975.

MICHAEL AVEDON

With Michael Bloomfield (left) and Dylan backstage at the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert in Carnegie Hall, January 20, 1968

Renaldo and Clara, which he filmed prior to and during the tour. "It's a collection of Revue performers," Ellott explains. "With a cameraman, Bob shot 200 hours of 35-millimeter Technicolor film. Sam Shepard wrote the script. I had fun as a would-be actor in mysterious and dense little dramatic scenes."

Elliott has formed many other musical friendships over his long career, including with Todd Snider, the late John Prine and Johnny Cash. "I looked up to Johnny Cash. Of course, I was only five-eight and he was six-eight, so I had no choice," Elliott jokes. "But he was a fine friend." Although they performed together only once — a rendition of Cash's "Take Me Home" on his ABC series, *The Johnny Cash Show*, in 1969 — Cash recorded Elliott's song "A Cuppa Coffee" on his 1966 album *Everybody Loves a Nut*.

Once, while visiting Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge at a Hollywood recording studio, Elliott was surprised to discover a small trio of famous players in the room. "Kris said, 'There's someone who loves you in Studio A,'" Elliott relates. "There were two gentlemen playing guitar when I got there: I recognized David Bromberg. The other guy was a Beatle, whom I didn't recognize. It turned out to be George Harrison. I looked around to see if I could recognize anybody else. There was Ringo, winking at me. I winked back. I thought, Well, that's cool."

From 2002 to 2006, Elliott joined Odetta and Josh White Jr. for the tour Glory Bound, honoring White's father, Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie. "Odetta's mother gave me the name Ramblin' in 1954," he reveals. He comes by the name honestly. Despite an extensive discography, Elliott prefers being on the road and performing live to audiences. "I like the spontaneity," he says simply. These days he plays a D'Angelico acoustic gifted to him by Bob Weir. "I had been playing a Martin D-28, a lovely guitar with a beautiful tone," he explains. "But it's big. Now I got arthritis in the shoulder from having to hold up my elbow parallel with the ground. I can't hold that guitar anymore."

He's had other age-related issues to deal with. Last summer, Elliott celebrated his 90th birthday, an event that was intended to go down with a bang. "Originally, the entire Guthrie family was going to host it at the Guthrie Center in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, on August 1, at the end of my first post-pandemic tour," he says. "But I had a little hospital episode that wasn't serious but managed to collapse the tour. Consequently, I lost my birthday party at the Center."

Elliott has since recovered and been on the road, playing in Idaho, Montana, Nevada and California. He recently performed his music with actor Robert Carradine at a gala Beverly Hills celebration of Jack Kerouac's centennial. And on June 26, Arlo Guthrie's daughter Sarah Lee performed with him at the 25th and farewell gathering of the Kate Wolf Festival. "There's a lot of Woody in her," he says of his mentor's granddaughter. "Once, I was admiring the pond on Arlo's farm. Little Sarah growled, 'You shouldn't swim in that pond. There's catfish in there.' I thought it was Woody talking to me."

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KING of the ROW

With more than 700 albums to his credit — including his Dean DeLeo project, Trip the Witch — Nashville session ace **Tom Bukovac** is one of the world's busiest guitarists. Here he shares the guitars behind Music Row's biggest records.

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELEANOR JANE

SINCE ARRIVING IN Nashville in the early ’90s, guitarist Tom Bukovac has performed on more than 700 albums by a veritable who’s who of the music industry’s upper elite. Just a cursory glance at his credits reveals names like Taylor Swift, Stevie Nicks, Vince Gill, Sheryl Crow, Don Henley, Carrie Underwood, Keith Urban, Faith Hill, Reba McEntire and Blake Shelton. And that doesn’t even take into account the numerous jingles, TV and film vehicles, and various other projects he’s performed on.

“It kind of boggles my mind,” Bukovac admits. “The sessions I get called for are so wide ranging. In a two-day period, I could go from playing heavy rock to ’70s L.A. studio jazz. I love the variety of music that’s coming out of this town. One minute I’m playing some nasty gut-bucket blues, and then I’m doing something crazy and spacey. For a guy like me who loves to play lots of different genres of music, it’s a never-ending source of inspiration.”

“I’M THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT I’M NO EXPERT ON ANYTHING. BUT I CAN FAKE IT. MOST OF THE SESSION PLAYERS AROUND HERE ARE LIKE THAT”

For five years straight, from 2005 to 2009, Bukovac won *MusicRow* magazine’s Session Guitarist of the Year Award, and he’s been the recipient of multiple Top Guitarist nominations from the Academy of Country Music, winning three times. Asked if he can point to one reason for his success, he lets out a laugh. “I wish I knew,” he offers. “Maybe it’s because I don’t have just one card to play.” Which is another way of saying he’s no one-trick pony. Rather, he’s a complete guitarist, able to suss out in minutes just what a track needs to shine. Ask him to burn a free-form rock solo, and he’ll turn in a stone-cold, melodic gem bursting with hooks, heart and individuality. But he’s just as comfortable laying back and luxuriating in a rhythm pocket, like he’s just another member of the band.

“I’m the first to admit that I’m no expert on anything,” Bukovac says. “But I can fake it. Most of the session players around here are like that. You have to be that versatile to get lots of gigs. I’m not a hardcore jazzer, but I can make you

With Dave Stewart during the 2012 Voodoo Experience at City Park, New Orleans, October 27, 2012

ERIKA GOLDRING/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

think that I am. I'm not a legit country-and-western swing guy, but I can give you feeling and evoke the right emotion. If you're a schooled player, you can connect spiritually to what's in front of you and get the message across." He pauses, then adds, "As long as you have your muse."

For Bukovac, that last line is no cast-off stray thought. Recalling his "hot period" between 2009 and 2015, he says, "I think I played on every record that came out of Nashville during those years. I was working six, seven days a week, 13 hours a day. It was just insane. And I couldn't connect to the super-computerized pop country. It all became too much. I got totally burned out, and I damaged my muse. The desire to play music and the love of music are very precious things, and I totally lost both. I needed a break."

"I THINK I PLAYED ON EVERY RECORD THAT CAME OUT OF NASHVILLE BETWEEN 2009 AND 2015. I DAMAGED MY MUSE"

For the next three years, Bukovac took himself out of the game, refusing all session work while concentrating on 2nd Gear Used Music, a consignment shop he opened in the Berry Hill suburb of Nashville. He considered himself "basically retired," but it didn't stick. Little by little, he re-entered the recording fold — but on his terms.

"I didn't work the crazy hours anymore. I had a family, so that kind of schedule wouldn't work anymore," he says. "I'm not smart enough to think that all I needed was some time away, but it did me a world of good. And when I came back, I came back strong. The muse is in great condition, and I love music again. I feel like I'm playing better than ever now because I'm not burned out."

He notes that the studios in town are humming along at basically the same clip as they were pre-pandemic, but there was a brief shutdown in March 2020. On the first day of quarantine, a friend suggested Bukovac film some videos — essentially, "play some guitar and cheer people up." Which he did, starting with "The Coolest Guitar Chord of All Time" (an "E-flat 6-9 scenario" in an open G), he began churning out videos one by one, breaking down his favorite licks and sounds, and discussing gear and guitars while playing everything from reggae and what he calls "fake jazz" to "controlled hillbilly music" and deep blues.

The videos presented on Bukovac's Homeskoolin' YouTube channel now number in the hundreds, and they've amassed millions of views. "It's the craziest thing," he says. "As a session player, you're kind of anonymous. People have always said, 'You should brand yourself.' I never knew how, but through doing these videos I've sort of put myself on the map. Now I have people say to me, 'Dude, come to this session. Can you do what you did in video so and so?' It's brought me a lot of new fans."

One such admirer turned out to be Stone Temple Pilots guitarist Dean DeLeo, who reached out to Bukovac by email and expressed his enthusiasm for the series. The two began corresponding, and before long they decided to collaborate on a project called Trip the Witch. Their self-titled album is a stunning collection of 10 vibey, mostly instrumental tracks that blend rock, blues, country and blissed-out psychedelia, on which the two players engage in a seamless musical conversation made all the more astonishing given the fact that they've never even met — the entire record was done remotely. (The album's sole vocal tune, a cosmic wonder titled "Saturn We Miss You," features Yes legend Jon Anderson, who beamed in his performance from his home studio.)

"Dean and I consider ourselves long-lost brothers," Bukovac says. "Making this record was one of the most satisfying experiences I've ever had. We would send ideas back and forth — we complemented each other beautifully." He adds with a laugh, "I'd love to meet Dean someday, but I don't know if I even need to."

Releasing a solo album was never high on Bukovac's bucket list, but last year, encouraged by the success of Homeskoolin', he gathered a bunch of session pals — namely producer Chris McHugh, bassist Steve Mackey, rhythm guitarist Jerry McPherson and drummer/engineer Shannon Forrest — to record *Plexi Soul* (available on bandcamp.com). To be sure, there are moments of bravura guitar playing throughout, but much in the same spirit of Trip the Witch, it's an entertaining mood record that touches on Pink Floydian spaceiness, Steely Dan–esque lounge pop, sleek R&B grooves, and even some nods to British blues and midwestern hard rock. "I made the record as sort of a documentation of some of my personal favorite loop jams from the video show," Bukovac says. "It was a blast to make. The whole thing was cut totally analog on 24-track two-inch tape. We were pretty rehearsed as a band, so everything came together quickly, with hardly any overdubs or fixes. The response has been more positive than I ever could have imagined. I'll do another one down the road."

Let's go back to when you started playing. You picked up the guitar at age eight.
That's right. My older brother played a bit, and he showed me some things to get me

Duesenberg Tom Bukovac Session Man Signature

"I'm very proud of this one," Bukovac says. "It's the first natural-finish guitar Duesenberg ever made. No fretboard inlays or metal pickguard trim. Two humbuckers and a blendable piezo." OPPOSITE: Bukovac's 1978 B.C. RIch Eagle. "I use that a lot on the tour I'm doing with Ann Wilson this summer."

going. I wasn't good at sports, but the guitar came very easily to me. I took lessons for a minute, but I didn't even bring my guitar to the lessons, because it was all theory.

Which bands or guitarists were you listening to as a young player?
It was all Beatles for me. After them I discovered early Bowie, and then I got into Genesis, Floyd, Yes, the Police, Steely Dan, the Cars… I liked the Stones and Zeppelin, but I wouldn't call them huge influences. Of all the guitarists, though, I have to single out David Gilmour. He's my favorite.

I understand that you started playing in your mother's nightclub in Cleveland when you were just 13.
Absolutely. The place was the Surfside Lounge, which is a title of one of the songs on the Trip the Witch album. It was a little shot-and-beer joint that my father originally owned. He died when I was really young, and then my mom took over the place. I was playing there every weekend by the time I was 13. I sat in with older guys and we'd do Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers. They called me "the boy wonder" because I could play the shit out of anything we did. I had no adult supervision — played till all hours of the morning. It was crazy.

How did you decide to pick up and head for Nashville?
As much as I loved Cleveland, I realized pretty quickly that my options were limited if I stayed there. I had to go to a real music city. I should have left when I was 19 or 20, but I wasted several years and didn't move to Nashville till I was 24, in 1992. In Cleveland, if you tell people you play guitar, they go, "So what do you really do?" But in Nashville, musicians are taken seriously. The difference was night and day.

Were your playing abilities fully developed when you got to town?
Pretty much, but I had a good ear. Even when I was a little kid, I could tell when something wasn't right. I would hear people playing songs, and I'd say, "That's not the right chord." I could figure out the right chord faster than anybody. I think that proved valuable when I made the move. All you had to do was play me a piece of music and I could tell what it needed.

Did you go to Nashville with the intention of being in a band, or did you want to be a session guy?
I just wanted to do something professional. I didn't care what it was, as long as it wasn't playing in cover bands for 50 bucks a night. I went around and networked. I saw bands and talked to everybody. That's what you have to do — get yourself around. I found out fast that the only way to get gigs was through word of mouth. It took me a few months to get

"YOU CAN'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. IF SOMEBODY DOESN'T LIKE YOUR IDEA, ACCEPT IT AND MOVE ON. THINK OF A NEW IDEA"

on the road with a real touring act — Wynonna Judd. Before then, I was doing low-budget gigs.

Very quickly, though, you transitioned to studio session work.
Yeah. I noticed that the real players weren't doing road gigs; they were in the studio cutting records. I was like, Man, I wonder if I could be one of those guys. I'd be at rehearsal places and I would see all the crazy rigs that people like Brent Mason owned. I thought, He must be good if he's got all that equipment.

Was breaking in akin to crashing an exclusive club?
That's a good way of putting it. It was like a club, and it still is. The scene changes every few years as new guys come in and older guys retire, but for the most part it's a club with about 100 guys on various instruments. There's, like, 15 guitar players, 15 bass players and so on. We all know one another, and we all speak the same language. Every session you do, it's a mix of those same 100 guys.

It sounds like a bigger, newer version of the Wrecking Crew.
Kind of. The thing is, these players all know how to work fast. You have to be quick to work here. It's very pro.

Can you point to a session that felt like your big break?
It was kind of cumulative. I did a lot of crap sessions in the early days — demos and low-budget sessions. That's how you cut your teeth and get your name around, but it's also how you learn the way things work. You can't just jump in on a big session with a big artist — you'll choke. I did my time on the horrible demos and terrible sessions, but as I got better and better, my time came.

I think it was around 2003 when Dann Huff started hiring me. He was already a huge guitarist in his own right before he started producing. All the other producers in town were looking at him and copying what he did. That's what really got me noticed. Once I was working with Dann, people called me. I became "the guy." I had so many gigs coming at me, I couldn't possibly do them all — lots of country but also rock. It was just overwhelming.

Dann's seal of approval really meant something to artists and other producers.
Oh, definitely. In those days, he was doing things like Rascal Flatts, who were huge at the time. We did a lot of those early records — Faith Hill and a ton of artists. I continue to work with Dann. In fact, I worked with him the other day. He's still a dear friend. He uses a lot of the younger guys now, but that's just a logical progression.

What kinds of guitars were you using in the early days?
I've always been a big vintage freak. I bought my first vintage guitar when I was about 18, and since then I've always scrambled to find cooler guitars. I played a

Senn Original

Bukovac's white Senn Strat-style is much loved and well played. "I've had it for 20 years and played the finish off the neck," he says. The electronics include Lollar pickups and an Ilitch noise-canceling system.

lot of old 335s in the early days. I was known as a 335 guy, which is funny because I don't own a 335 anymore. Now everybody plays one, and that started with me. I stood out because I used that guitar.

Earlier, you said that you couldn't pinpoint exactly why people hired you.
Well, there's probably a few things. I guess one thing that made me stand out was because I came from somewhere else musically. I was into trippy rock atmosphere stuff — Radiohead and Pink Floyd. In the country world, that music didn't exist. People were still chicken-picking on Teles. That's all anybody wanted. I mean, I can chicken-pick, but it's not my stock and trade. When people heard what I did, they started to shift toward cool atmospheric stuff with more of a rock edge.

You were just doing what you heard in your head.
Yeah, and people dug it: "He's the guy! He can do all the trippy, crazy echo stuff." It was good timing for me. I wasn't smart enough to preconceive that's what I needed to do. I was just lucky because that's what I liked to do. Then it got to the point where I did so much of that, I got tired of it. I've made several reinventions — you have to do it if you want to keep growing. Like just recently, I changed my gear around and switched to small combo amps. I try to keep it fresh and original. I don't want to be known for doing just one sound.

Has there been an artist or producer who really challenged you and pushed you out of your comfort zone?
Matt Serletic. He's made a bunch of big records, and I played with him a lot in the old days. A lot of stuff I did on other sessions that people loved, he was like, "Dude, we've got to get better than that. We've got to do something original." What I was playing would've worked for most people, but not him. He was looking for something fresher. That's when you dig. You try things — new ways of playing, different pedals.

Personally, as long as I know the person's a genius, I like to be challenged. If I did a session and everybody loves each note I play, it's like I don't have to try. That's when you know the record isn't going to be good, because nobody's really trying. I think great records come from a little bit of tension.

I imagine personalities come into play with getting hired. It's one thing to be a great player, but if you're a jerk...
Nobody's going to want to work with you. You've got to be a cool guy and be able to hang and work with people. Studios are like any workplace: If you're a jerk, you're not going to last. And you can't take anything personally. If somebody doesn't like your idea, accept it and move on. Think of a new idea.

"I'VE MADE SEVERAL REINVENTIONS. YOU HAVE TO IF YOU WANT TO KEEP GROWING"

At the same time, it must not be easy if you're dealing with a temperamental artist who is wasting time, and not always for a good reason.
Some artists are really great to deal with, and there's some who aren't cool. I mean, I'll follow anybody down a weird rabbit hole, but they have to have one of two qualifications: A, they have to be nice, or B, they have to be a genius.

Are you generally a one-take guy?
I can be, but I prefer to work on things for a long time. Left to my own devices, I could spend a whole day working on one song so I can make it sound amazing. Sure, I can do one take and it'll be fine. But it takes a little time to find those magic moments. Sometimes you're against the clock, but a lot of times you can find some wiggle room and perfect things a bit more.

Do you have any favorite studios in Nashville?
Blackbird Studios. John McBride, who runs the place, he's one of my best friends. That studio is amazing. It's like one big playground for me — all the rooms and the microphones. He's got millions of dollars in mics alone. But I can basically work anywhere. As long as I've got a good engineer, I can get a nice sound. The first thing I do when I walk through the door of any studio, I ask, "Who's engineering?" A bad engineer can ruin any session. Conversely, a great engineer can make an average session sound amazing.

How many guitars do you usually bring to a session?
I have a cartage rig that gets delivered to every session, and inside is a coffin full of a dozen guitars. Every once in a while, you'll do a session where they don't want

ERIKA GOLDRING/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

1963 Gibson Firebird V Reverse in Sunburst

"That's my main guitar on the Ann Wilson gig," he says. Bukovac also owns a 1965 Firebird I with a rare Ember Red finish.

you to bring your cartage. That can be a bit rough; it limits your options. But you make do. If they just want you to bring a few things, I'll bring a humbucker guitar, a Strat, maybe a Tele or a hollowbody.

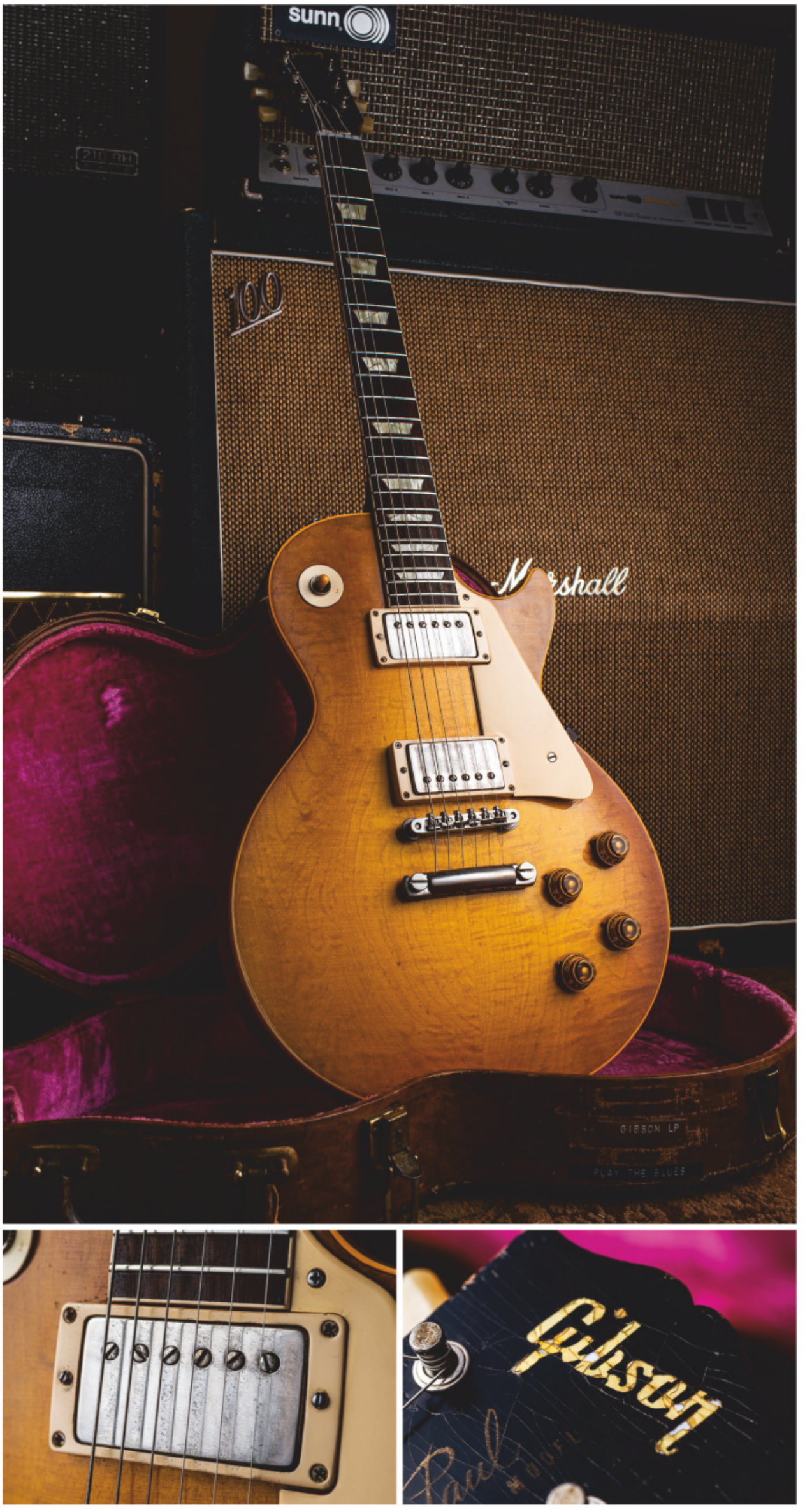
My signature Duesenberg does it for me. It's like a Swiss Army knife. It's got a whammy bar, humbuckers and different tone options. If I'm going to bring just one guitar, it's super versatile.

You have a pretty sweet '58 burst.
I bought that a while ago, and I bring that everywhere. People are like, "I can't believe you bring that thing out of the house!" But I use it on everything.

Which Tele do you bring with you: the 1960 Custom?
Absolutely. Killer guitar. Whenever you need a Tele, there it is. I just recently bought back a '62 Strat that I owned years ago. I should have never sold it. I've been using that a lot. There's a few things I'm missing that I don't have anymore. I don't have a Gretsch and a 335, but I can get those sounds with other things.

When does your Firebird come out?
Oh, man, I play it all the time. The Firebird is a great Nashville guitar, because it's got the midrange that can cut through a big band. It's like a big giant Tele. It really works great for the kind of music that we're doing here. Actually, I would prefer that over the Tele. I was playing my Firebird today on a session. I've got one with P-90s, and I've got one with the regular mini-humbuckers. I use them both equally.

You said you've been using combo amps lately...
Exactly. I've mostly been using an old Deluxe Reverb on pretty much everything. I've got a bunch of old Marshalls that I love, Plexis and things. I've got an AC30. I try to have all the classic stuff. I've got a tweed Bassman and some small amps. I try to have a little bit of everything, but I also like to go direct a lot. I'll go right off my pedalboard into the console. I was doing that yesterday, and it sounded amazing. If you have a great engineer, you're good to go.



1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard
Bukovac's 'Burst is all original, except for its frets. "People are like, 'I can't believe you bring that thing out of the house!'" he says. "But I use it on everything."

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Chris Martin displays the 2.5 millionth Martin guitar at day one of the 2022 NAMM Show, June 3

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A STRANGE NEW WORLD

Is NAMM history? The Anaheim event gave insights to the future of acoustic gear — and of the show itself.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

FOR THE FIRST time since 2020, the music industry descended upon Mickey Mouse Land to get its NAMM dance on, and from jump street it was — well...*weird*. We may have been in the right place — the Anaheim Convention Center — but it was the "wrong" time. NAMM took place on the first weekend in June, whereas Anaheim traditionally hosts the huge Winter NAMM Show in January, and Nashville presents a smaller Summer NAMM Show in July. While a scaled-back event was held in Nashville in 2021, this year's bash was intended to be the extra-large experience the Anaheim show usually is. The turnout, however, was extra small.

If the Anaheim show is a primary litmus test for the state of the musical instrument biz, what does it say about the industry's health? In short, it's complicated. Some manufacturers — the majors, mostly — are thriving, while the majority are struggling. The sheer number of empty aisles at the show indicated that many not only didn't make it to the show — they didn't make it, period. Everyone has had to adapt, and the situation remains fluid as the pandemic continues to wreak havoc on supply chains and personnel. With the show taking place amid Orange County's COVID surge, the story this year was less about new gear drops and celebrity performances, and more about human beings. There was an overwhelming sentiment of, "Damn, it's good to see you again!" The first exchange was always some version of "How've you been?" followed up with anecdotes about life under COVID. The survival stories were compelling, and some were epic — like listening to a family history of how their folks made it to the New World. New-gear talk seemed like an afterthought.

But talk new gear we did. In the absence of Gibson, Fender and PRS, Martin and Taylor had an outsized presence, and their booths drew hordes. "We were pleasantly surprised," remarked Fred Greene, Martin's VP of product management. The lack of many big, loud booths also allowed smaller exhibitors to shine, with many of them pushing products developed a year or three ago. Some chose not to bring any goods at all and simply held meetings inside cubicles that turned parts of the show floor into office space. And yet somehow there was still enough cool new stuff that it was hard to walk more than 50 feet without running into something that you wanted to try out or someone you wanted to talk to.

The NAMM Show was shorter by a full day, with the media preview on Thursday and the show floor open Friday through Sunday. Martin's press preview kicked off the affair in a rather surreal setting. The star of the show was Rich Robinson, who was on hand to introduce his Custom Signature Edition D-28 ($6,999 street), which he calls the Appalachian. "My dad had a folk duo in the '50s called the Appalachians, so I called it that in tribute to him," he explains. The guitar is modeled and relic-ed precisely after his father's 1954 D-28."It was always there around the house when I was growing up," Robinson says, "and my dad gave it to me just as our band was blowing up." Robinson used that '54 to write tons of Black Crowes tunes, including his signature acoustic number, "She Talks to Angels." I gave the intro a go on the Appalachian, and it sounded right on the moneymaker.

Two other Martin Special Editions introduced at NAMM caught my fancy. The Custom Shop SC-2022 ($7,999 street) is the first Nazareth-made instrument with the SC style introduced at the January 2020 NAMM convention. It combines the revolutionary SC body and Sure Align neck with features from Martin's other contemporary groundbreaker, the Modern Deluxe, such as solid tonewoods, Liquidmetal bridge pins and Fishman Aura VT Blend electronics. The Custom Shop

SC-2022 ups the ante with a dazzling fretboard inlay. Limited to just 300 instruments, it's bound to be a collector's item and quite possibly a harbinger of more American-made SCs to come. Stay tuned for a deeper story on this development in our upfront New & Cool department.

The Custom Major Kealakai ($7,999 street) is a re-creation of a guitar Martin made for the Hawaiian maestro back in 1916. Essentially an oversized 12-fret triple 0, it was Martin's first big guitar by modern standards and the precursor to the game-changing dreadnought. I relayed the basic story in the Frets Learn column in the Holiday 2019 issue because of a chance encounter on Oahu with esteemed luthier, player and Hawaiian musical historian Kilin Reece of KR Strings, Honolulu, who had just received the prototype. He was also at this show, and has much more to add to this truly historic story, including a documentary film and a partnership with Martin and others to launch the Pacific String Museum in November. We'll catch up with Reese closer to then.

Taylor Guitars' new koa 722ce (left) and 724ce

Finally the 2.5 millionth Martin was unveiled, showing off a starry top that replicates the night sky as it would have appeared over Manhattan when C.F. Martin and his family arrived in America in 1833. Fast-forward to last year, and the big news was that Chris Martin IV was handing the reigns over to Thomas Ripsam. The avid Martin fan and player is now celebrating his first anniversary as the company's president and CEO. "It's been like a whirlwind," he told me when we caught up, "stepping into such historic shoes. "We've had a great year, and we're still dealing with the boom. There's been a lot of demand for our guitars, which is wonderful, but there have also been many challenges, from supply chain issues to all kinds of other stuff in this weird time. The key is to make sure that each and every Martin guitar is special, with the kind of top quality that leads to an emotional connection with the player."

Martin wasn't the only company with a new head honcho. Taylor Guitars dropped a press release on the eve of the show declaring Andy Powers the company's president and CEO, as well as chief guitar designer. Former president Bob Taylor and CEO Kurt Listug (both Taylor cofounders) will become senior advisors and co-chairs on the board of directors. The move puts Powers, who is just 41 years old, on the same playing field as Fender's Andy Mooney and Gibson's J.C. Curleigh. Last year, Taylor

THIS YEAR'S SHOW WAS A REMINDER THAT NAMM REMAINS AN IMPORTANT JUNCTURE BETWEEN MUSICIANS AND GEAR MAKERS — OR, TO USE ANOTHER WORD, *PEOPLE*

Rich Robinson (left) and Frets editor Jimmy Leslie with the new Martin Rich Robinson Custom Signature Edition D-28

announced transfer of ownership to its employees, so the company enjoys a new leader at the helm of a ship owned by its employees and under the direction of two sustainably minded co-founders who are intent on ensuring a strong legacy — not to mention, plenty of quality tonewood for the future.

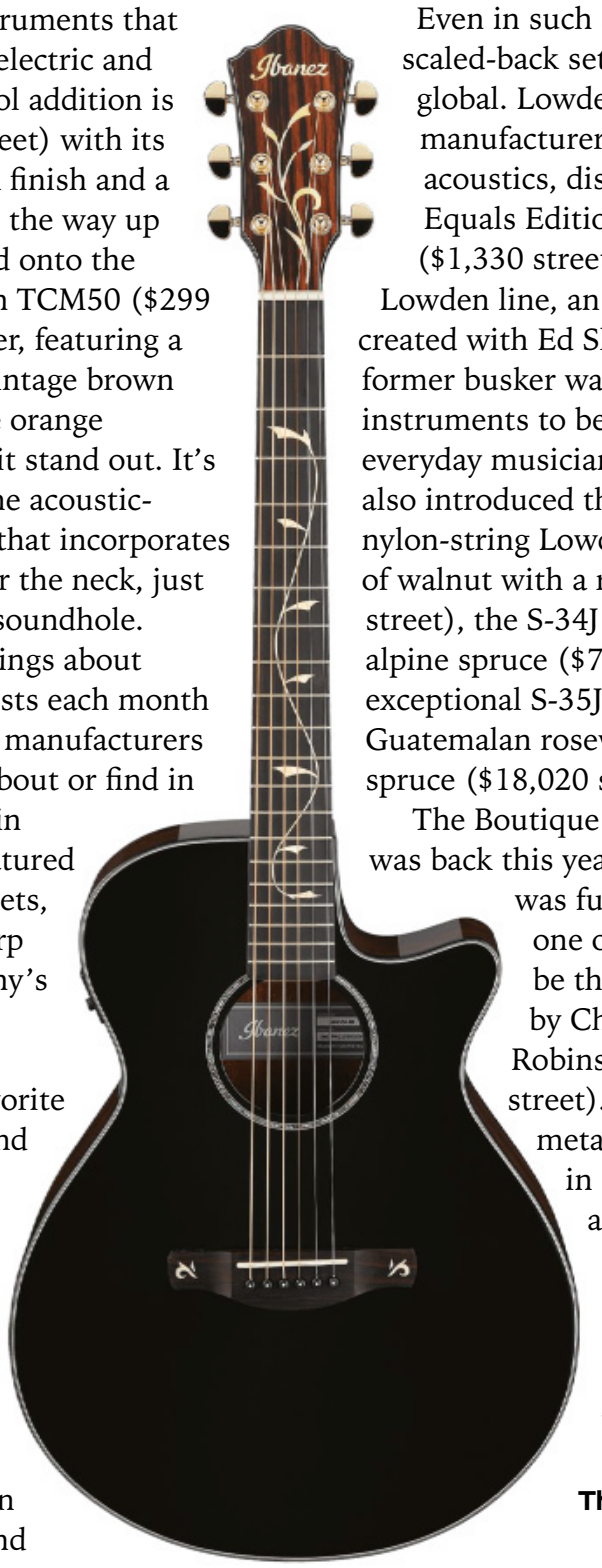
Taylor has a Hawaiian partnership to sustainably supply and grow koa, and Powers is obsessed with it. He summed up the Taylor ethos in a phrase that should one day be the title of his memoir: "From soil to song." Powers thrives at NAMM, where he gives interviews with guitar in hand, playing original compositions to illustrate why a given guitar was created and how he

uses that particular tool for specific playing styles. As an example, he noted how the established Koa Series has a sophisticated look and sound, and how he's taking an entirely different approach with the new all-solid-koa 700 series, consisting of the Grand Auditorium 724ce and the Grand Concert 722ce (both $3,499 street). Powers says the 700 series is designed for a more workman-like look and feel, and a sweeter midfocused tone, with oodles of dynamic nuance. He let me do some comparisons, and the new series does sound less booming and more nuanced.

Ibanez had a big booth showcasing its wares with lots of instruments that blur the line between electric and acoustic. A notably cool addition is the AEG550 ($399 street) with its sleek, high-gloss black finish and a vine inlay that runs all the way up an ebony fretboard and onto the headstock. The Talman TCM50 ($299 street) is an eye-catcher, featuring a figured ash top with vintage brown sunburst and a unique orange pickguard that makes it stand out. It's a wildly shaped thinline acoustic-electric hybrid design that incorporates a magnetic pickup near the neck, just beyond an offset oval soundhole.

One of the great things about talking to acoustic artists each month is that they hip you to manufacturers you might not know about or find in your local store. Yasmin Williams, who was featured in the January 2022 Frets, plays a Timberland harp guitar, and the company's booth featured several capably showcased by Andrew Kasab. My favorite guitar at the Timberland booth was the T90Cc Solid Silkwood OM Cutaway. It's snazzy looking, with an arm bevel and a Venetian cutaway. It plays well and is a strong value at $2,249.

One of the most fun instruments to be found at NAMM this year is made by pickup manufacturer Lace Music Products. The Electric Cigar Box Guitar (three- or four-string, $349 street) isn't made from an actual cigar box, but it's built to look like one and comes in an array of different designs. It has a Lace Matchbook pickup with a push/pull coil tap to select between humbucking and single-coil. I'd never played one before, but it was in an open tuning, so that was easy enough to figure out and get a song going. My bandmate Jules Leyhe grabbed a slide, and it sounded great on the box as well. You can see the duo jam on *GP*'s Instagram.



The Ibanez AEG550

Even in such a significantly scaled-back setting, NAMM was global. Lowden, an Irish manufacturer of high-end acoustics, displayed the new Equals Edition signature model ($1,330 street) in its Sheeran by Lowden line, an affordable range created with Ed Sheeran, who as a former busker wanted his signature instruments to be attainable by everyday musicians. The company also introduced three fantastic new nylon-string Lowdens: the S-23J made of walnut with a red cedar top ($6,850 street), the S-34J made of koa with alpine spruce ($7,645 street) and the exceptional S-35J made of Guatemalan rosewood and alpine spruce ($18,020 street).

The Boutique Guitar Showcase was back this year, and in an area that was full of unique items, one of the coolest had to be the Domino Resonator by Chicago's Robert Robinson Guitars ($12,000 street). It's essentially a metal resonator housed in a wooden body with a removable face that has six circular sound ports that make it look like a domino. It sounded very much like Duane Allman's tone on "Little Martha," so we tuned it to open E and gave it a go. You can watch video of Jules Leyhe playing it, also on our Instagram.

Teen guitarist Taj Farrant came to the show and left with both a new Taylor GS Mini and a new title: Taylor Artist.

And because this NAMM show was all about human connections, we had a memorable moment when we ran into Australian teen sensation Taj Farrant outside. When Taj told us he was considering approaching Taylor for an endorsement deal, we marched him upstairs and made an introduction to Taylor A&R man Tim Godwin. Taj's team made the case for his rising star, noting that he's played with Santana and has huge social numbers. After playing a little to demonstrate his prodigious chops, Taj was made a Taylor artist and left with a new GS Mini. It was inspiring to watch a young musician's dreams be realized — a magical moment happening in the shadow of Disneyland.

So how will the NAMM Show look next year? That's the million-dollar question. It's clearly dependent on many factors, such as new COVID variants and how manufacturers feel about this year's show. But one has to imagine the show will bounce back to some degree, if not immediately all the way. And while some may be quick to make too much of NAMM's declining attendance, this year's show was a reminder that it remains an important juncture between musicians and gear makers — or, to use another word, *people*. The NAMM Show was a step forward toward resuming some semblance of normalcy, and a fantastic opportunity to reconnect with old friends as well as make new ones.

WHAT SHOULD I PRACTICE?

In the first part of this two-part lesson, great guitarists share advice on how to make the most of your time in the woodshed.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

"WHAT SHOULD I practice?" It's a question I can remember asking myself many times, always while sitting in silent frustration with a guitar in my lap. You likely have found yourself in the same predicament. And these days, with so much information out there, making good, worthwhile choices can be even more daunting. If only I could have asked great guitarists what they practiced… Well, that's exactly what I did for this lesson!

All the guitarists featured here are professional musicians who work in a variety of different roles and settings. Some you may have heard of, others you likely haven't. But I approached them because they all know what it takes to be a successful working guitarist — most notably, the ability to be creative and musical. So I asked them for something they worked on that they felt ultimately helped them to accomplish this

Ex. 1

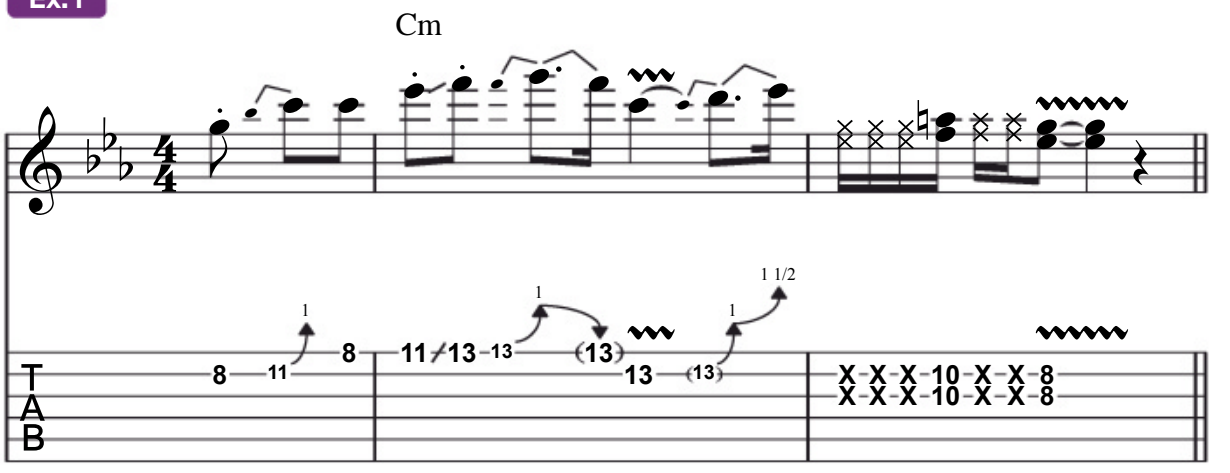
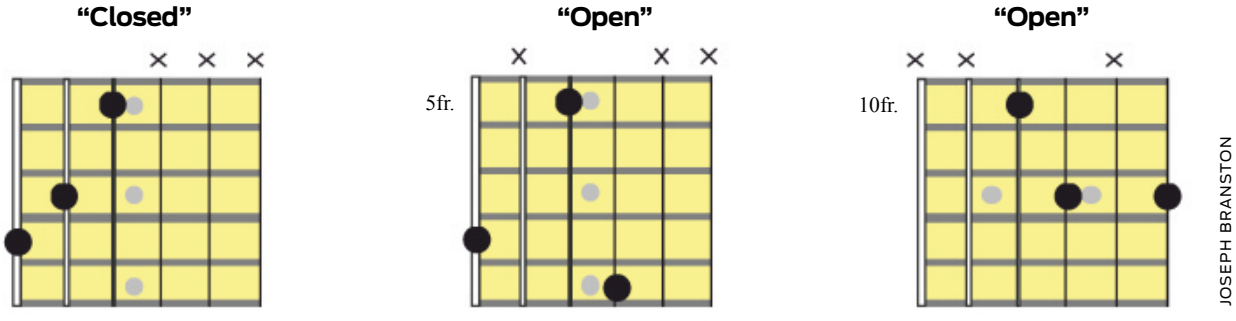


Fig. 1 **C major triad**



JOSEPH BRANSTON

MORE ONLINE!

For audio/video of this lesson, go to **guitarplayer.com/sept22-lesson**

— something that made them say, "I'm glad I worked on that!"

Let's dive right in! There's a lot to present here, and so we split this lesson into two parts, with part 2 coming next month. Note that each musical example has accompanying audio or video, which will be posted on guitarplayer.com. With the exception of Examples 1, 2, and 3a, all feature the artist themselves.

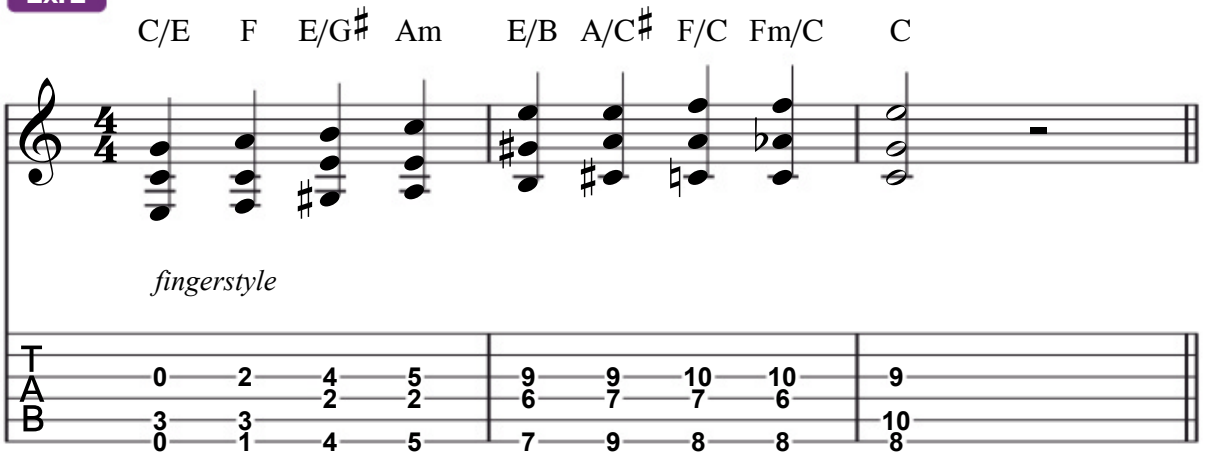
In addition to touring with the likes of Chris Cornell and Melissa Etheridge, Pete Thorn (peterthorn.com) has created an immensely popular YouTube channel, where he creates insightful demos for the gear aficionado in us all. Pete sent along this nugget of wisdom: "I'm glad that I practiced learning the songs, licks and approaches of several of my heroes, and I tried not only to get the notes and rhythms just right, but also worked hard to get the phrasing and spirit right. The notes and rhythms are like the lines in an actor's script, but the phrasing and intention/spirit are what bring them to life: the drama of Brian May's leads, the delicate intention of David Gilmour's solo phrases, or the high-octane, joy-filled exuberance of Eddie Van Halen's inspired, off-the-cuff improvisations."

Let's put this into action by taking a look at **Ex. 1**, a phrase in the style of David Gilmour. More than simply learning the notes, try to capture the way Gilmour would play them. Do this by paying close attention to the musical details. For example, the staccato dots, indicating to cut certain notes short, as well as the relaxed nature of the release and subsequent bend in bar 1.

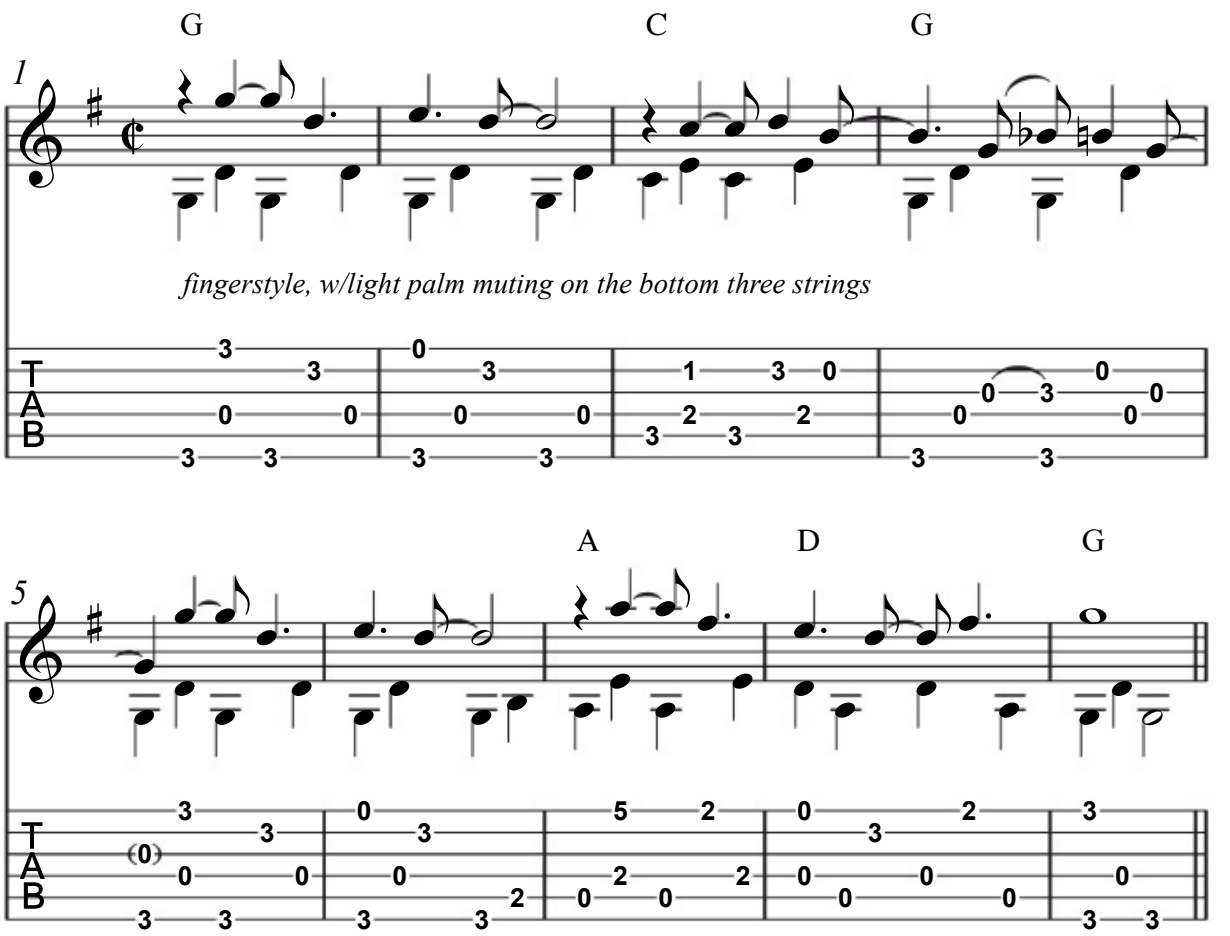
Dale Turner (intimateaudio.com) is a rock singer/songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and film composer, and was *Guitar World*'s prestigious "Hole Notes" and "Acoustic Nation" columnist. If that isn't enough, he has been an instructor at Hollywood's Musicians Institute for the past 21 years. Dale offered the nifty suggestion to learn open-voiced, or "spread," triads.

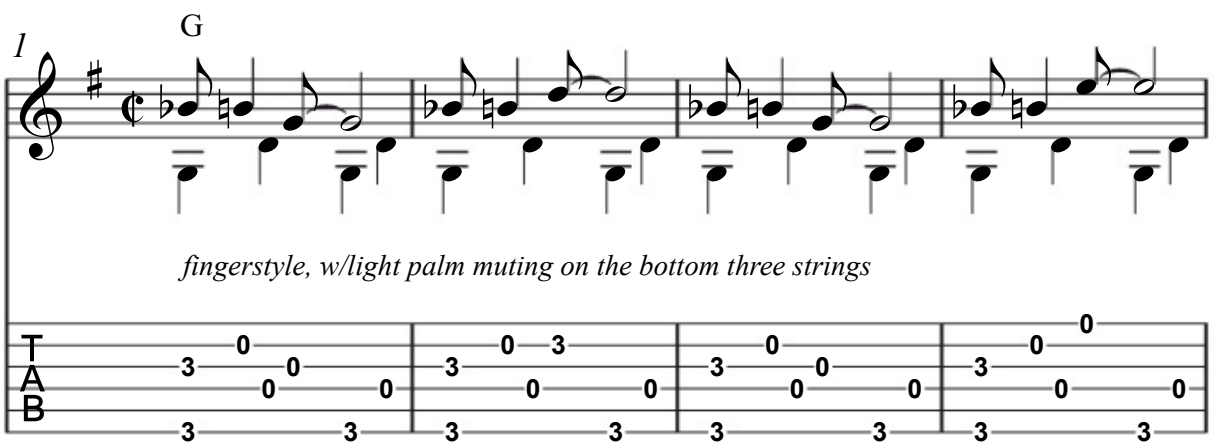
Fig. 1 illustrates how a "closed" triad voicing — with all three notes on adjacent strings — can be magically transformed into an "open" one, by

Ex. 2



Ex. 3a



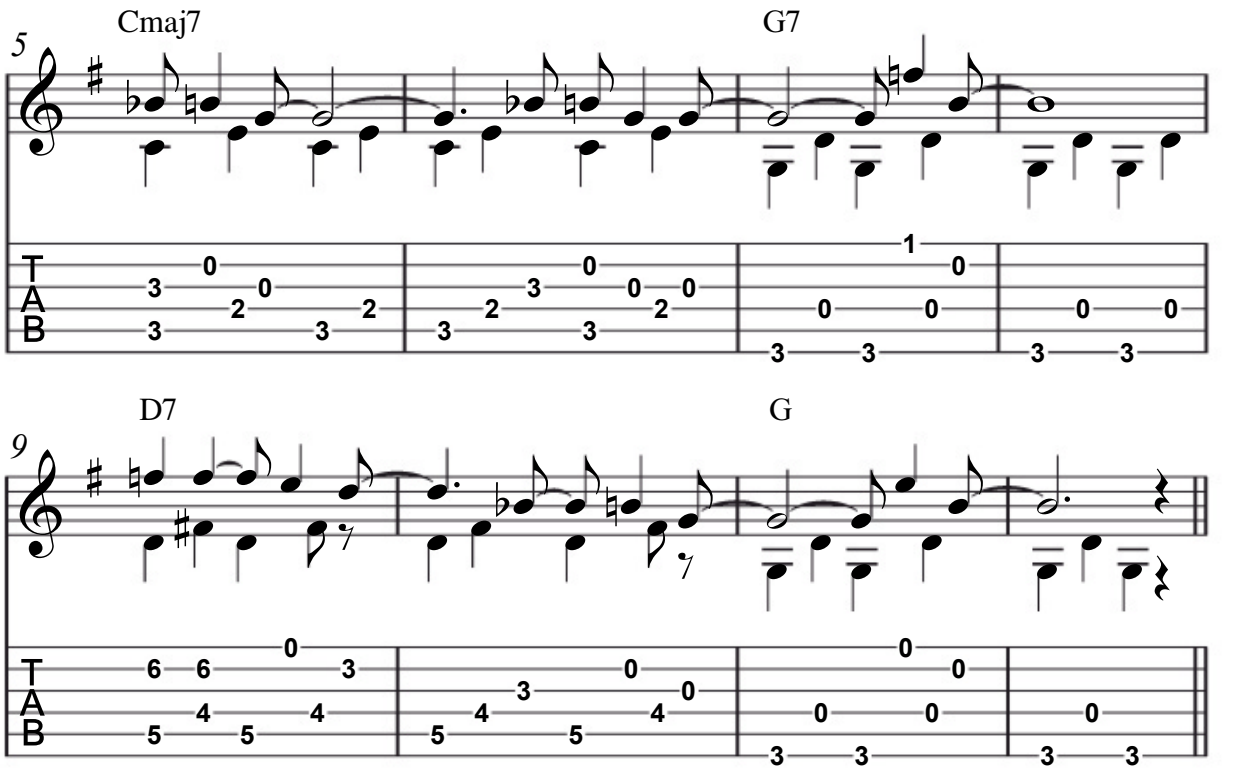
Ex. 3b **Capo 5th fret. All tablature positions are relative to capo. All music sounds in the key of C, a perfect 4th higher than written.**

simply taking the middle note and moving it up an octave. See how the middle note of a root-position C major triad (C, E, G), the 3rd (E), initially fingered on the A string's 7th fret in the first diagram, is moved up an octave to the G string's 9th fret in the middle diagram. In the third diagram, Dale shows us the same voicing moved up an octave, at no extra charge. He highlighted that spread triads come in quite handy for his work as a film composer, and **Ex. 2** demonstrates the sense of drama they can create.

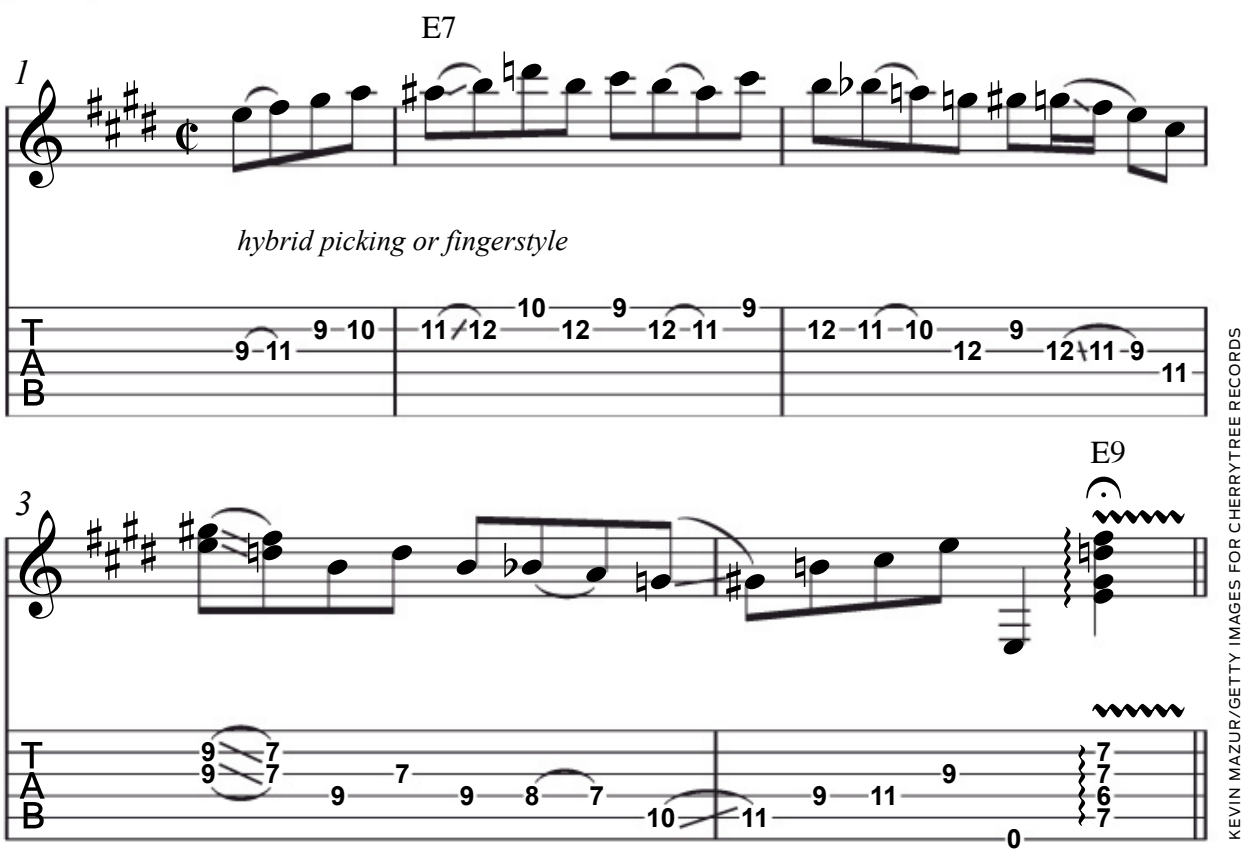
Bess Rogers (bessrogers.com) is a Nashville-based singer/songwriter, who has released multiple albums (*Out of the Ocean*, *Can't Remember Where*), licensed her music for ad campaigns (Cheerios, Google) and, in 2019, was a member of the pit band for the Go-Go's Broadway musical, *Head Over Heels*. Somehow, Bess still finds the time to run an online songwriting school and community with friend and writing partner Allie Moss called Thinking Outside the Blocks.

Bess recommends exploring new styles of music, and she recently challenged herself to play songs by blues and gospel singer/guitarist Blind Gary Davis. Bess explains, "At the time, I just learned them for fun, but in the end, it really opened up the possibilities for me in my playing. I've written several songs inspired by those songs I learned." **Ex. 3a** is based on Davis's style, but check out **Ex. 3b** to see how Bess made it her own, in her as-yet-unreleased song, "Little Scientist."

Gilber Gilmore (youtube.com/user/1972f1972) is a major women's fashion designer. He also just happens to be a veteran of New York City's live music scene. A rock player for most of his life, Gilber challenged himself to learn a new style of music in much the same way Bess Rogers did, but he has done so with results that are completely different from hers. When he discovered he loved the sound of country guitar "chicken pickin'," he spent two years perfecting a three-minute tour de force by guitarist/teacher Doug Seven. See **Ex. 4a** for one of Gilber's smoking-hot licks in this style.

Bess Rogers performing at New York City's Webster Hall on March 9, 2015.



Ex. 4a

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR CHERRYTREE RECORDS

In addition to discovering myriad new ways to use string bends, playing country guitar also introduced Gilber to a new technique: *hybrid picking*, or playing with a pick and fingers simultaneously or in an alternating manner.

But wait, there's more! Since he now had greater facility with his picking hand, Gilber found himself delving into the world of acoustic fingerstyle guitar, especially after seeing virtuoso Tommy Emmanuel perform. Check out **Ex. 4b** for a taste of Gilber's acoustic playing. As you can see in the previous example's video, Gilber now even plays country without a pick. He shows us how learning something new can lead you to unexpected places.

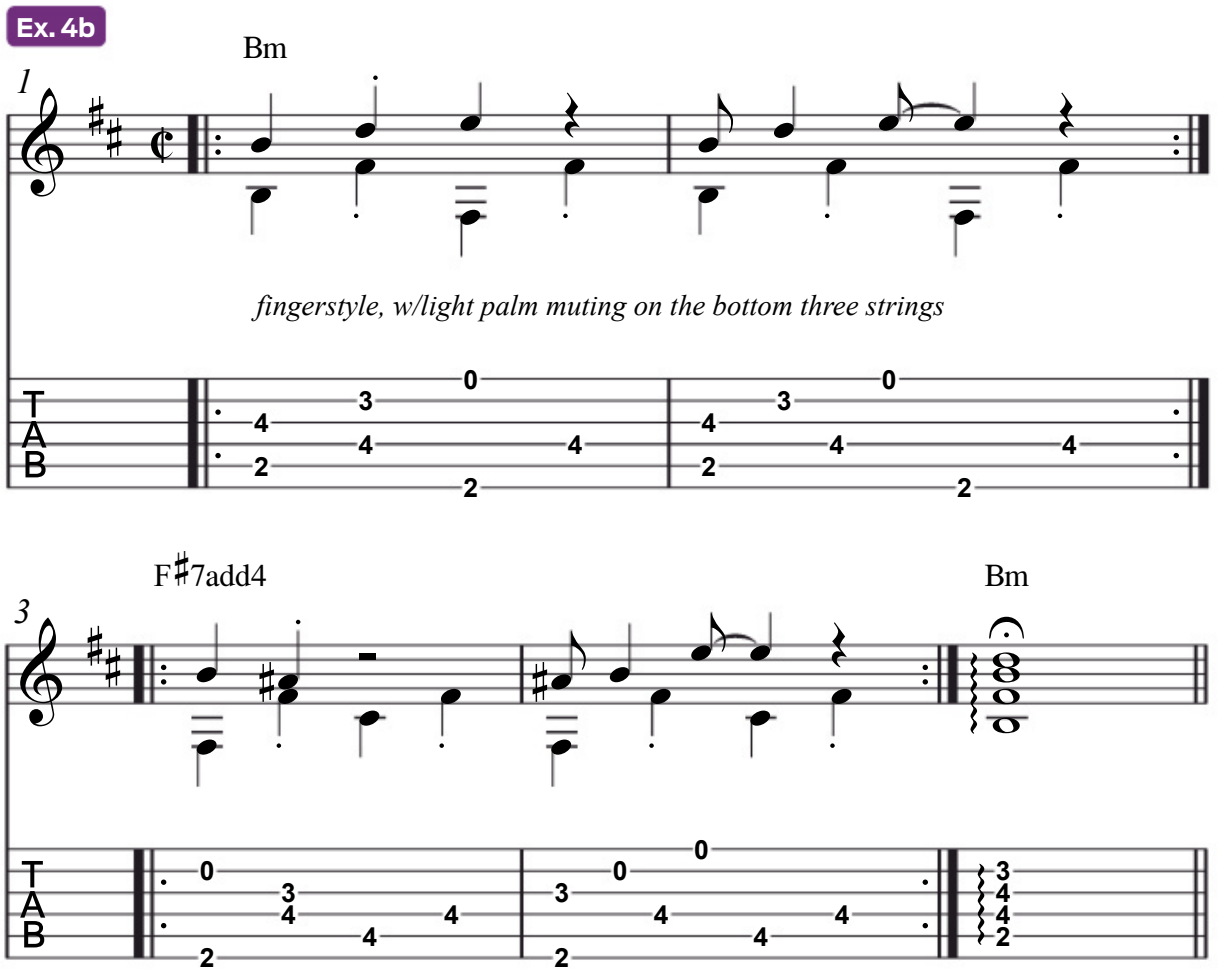
If you check out singer/songwriter Abby Ahmad's (abbyahmad.com) Instagram (@abbyahmad) or TikTok (@blabbyabby_), you'll find that she is hilarious. But Abby takes her songwriting and guitar playing very seriously. She routinely spends part of her practice time experimenting with open and alternate tunings in her quest for new sounds, often starting with common guitar fingerings borrowed from standard tuning.

In her video, she shows us step-by-step how, by exploring different tunings and using a capo, she was able to transform a musty old guitar cliché into something shiny and new. The resulting song, "Somewhere in Between," can be found on her excellent 2021 album, *Tea with Shadows*. In her own unique way, Abby describes this process as "taking something vanilla and infusing a caramel swirl!" See **Examples 5a** and **5b** to witness the transformation from tiresome to awesome.

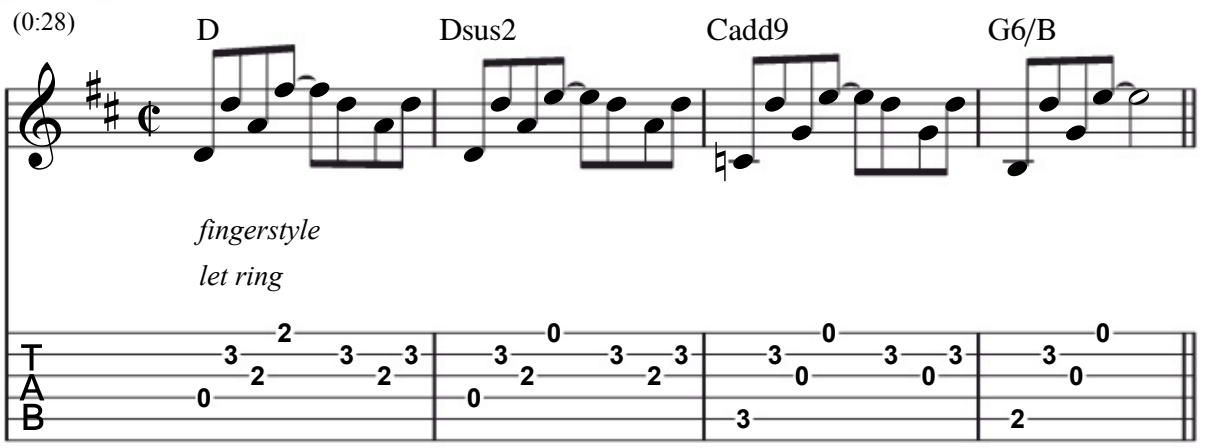
This has been so much fun that we're going to continue next month with more great guitarists' practice advice, including Joel Hoekstra of Whitesnake and Trans-Siberian Orchestra. See you then!

Have a question or comment about this month's lesson? Feel free to reach out to Jeff Jacobson on Twitter @jjmusicmentor or at jeffjacobson.net.

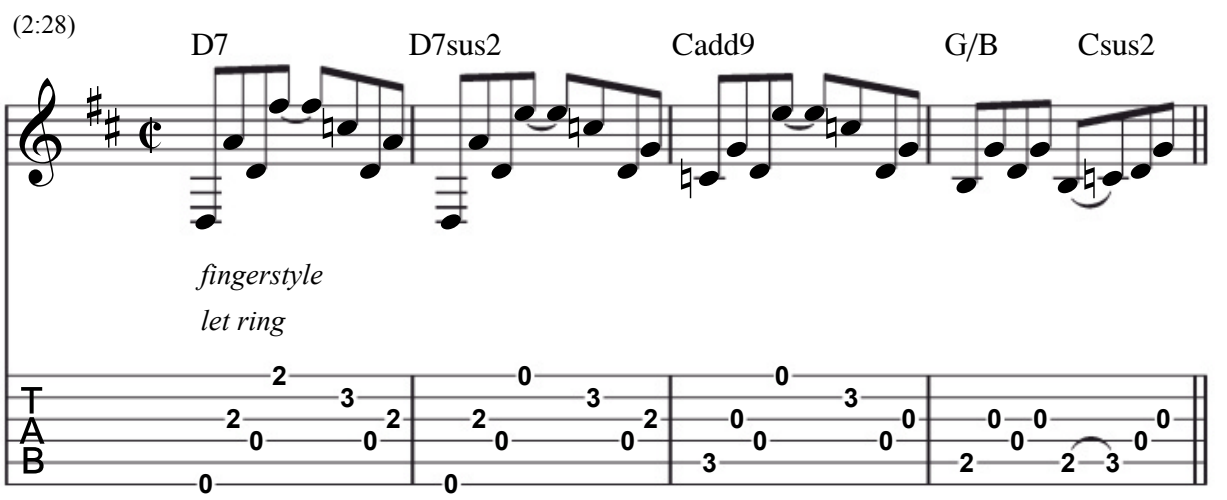
Ex. 4b



Ex. 5a



Ex. 5b **DADGAE tuning, capo 5th fret. All tablature positions are relative to capo. All music sounds in the key of G, a perfect 4th higher than written.**



Let It Rub

Trey Anastasio on using "rubs" to open up standard tuning.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

WHEN THE HEADMASTER of Phish School says, "The guitar is simultaneously the dumbest and the most amazing instrument ever," he's referring to the fretboard layout in standard tuning. Instead of ringing out harmoniously like an open tuning, standard is essentially "closed" and unharmonious. At least in the keys of E, A and D, the root note is on a wound, open string. Incorporating any open string adds resonance, and can create tension and suspension. Trey Anastasio refers to that as a "rub." He's got a new solo acoustic album out, *Mercy*, and in last month's Frets feature Anastasio revealed the depths of his rub obsession. We scratched the surface near the end of the interview and saved the details for this deeper dive.

FINDING RUBS

Anastasio says, "Doing solo acoustic shows is great for revealing where all the rub notes are on open strings that you may or may not include for a chord in various positions up and down the neck, just by the way you pick. You want as much sound as possible, so you want to include as many open strings as possible. I've got into the habit of looking for those by doing solo acoustic shows because you get into a mentality that's like, How can I get more sound out of this thing?"

MAKE IT EASY

"A lot of those rubs are in the standard vocabulary. I live by a rule put forth by Joe Pass, who is the greatest chord melody player who ever lived. He said, 'Never play anything hard,' and what he meant was 'hard to finger.' Why? His theory was that you're going to practice that and then want to play it, and now you're not playing music anymore. Watch his hands when he's playing with Ella Fitzgerald. The way he would just drop in a note is amazing. David Rawlings does the same kind of thing with Gillian Welch, and I love to do it too. 'Arc' is a great example from *Mercy*. That song is not hard, but it sounds hard. All of the work was in, How can I do this without it being hard?"

PUT IT IN PLAY, RUB AWAY!

"For example, you can get a full G plus rubs by using just two fingers in the 10th position. Put your third finger on the root G at the 10th fret and your second finger on the B at the 9th fret of the fourth string. The open G and B are right above on the next two strings, and the high open E is the 6th. There's a rub you can choose to use or not, either by not strumming all the way through or by using the pinkie to mute it. By the way, drop the pinkie on the 10th fret of the first string and you've got a full, open-sounding G chord. Move the whole thing down a step, to F, to find even more interesting rubs to choose from.

"Another great example is when you take a standard open C and slide everything up a whole step. Now you've got a D with a half step rub in it, the F♯ on the fourth string rubbing against the open G on the third. That's one of my favorites, and you can hear it on 'Billy Breathes' [*from Phish's 1996 album of the same name*]. Now raise that C shape another step and a half, to F, and listen to that G string rub in the middle. I love that. Rubs galore, rubs all day long. Let it rub, brother, let it rub!"

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets Editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player*– and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn all about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.*

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MARTIN

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

0012-28 and 000-42 Modern Deluxe

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

MARTIN'S INTRODUCTION OF the Modern Deluxe Series in 2019 was a major move, replacing the Vintage Series with this forward/retro series just above the Standard line, and this year the company has filled out the range with six new models. MDs have progressive features, including torrified tops, titanium truss rods, Liquidmetal bridge pins and carbon-fiber-composite bridge plates, as well as upscale appointments and a distinctive Vintage Deluxe neck. The whole concept is not to reinvent the wheel but rather to update it by judiciously applying modern technology to classic platforms.

Martin started with its most popular platforms: a pair of dreadnoughts, a triple 0 and an OM. All were in style 28, except the mahogany D-18. The new models essentially offer fancier appointments or smaller bodies. We picked one of each for review: the elegant 000-42 MD and the parlor-sized 0012-28 MD.

The 42 is a favorite Martin style because it's upscale, yet not as extravagant or expensive as the top-tier 45. It has oodles of luxurious appeal but isn't quite as blinged out with abalone all around. This 000-42 is stunning in classic fashion, featuring plenty of Golden Era abalone and mother-of-pearl inlays. I love the snowflake inlays on either end of the bridge, and on this MD the Liquidmetal bridge pins are golden, with top inlays that bring them in line with the rest of the design. The headstock logo tree is a thing of beauty as well.

The 0012-28 has the same Modern Deluxe appointments as its predecessors, including a script logo of inlaid abalone on the headstock, abalone side dots and small diamond fretboard inlays, and European flamed-maple body bindings unique to the MD line. Its Liquidmetal bridge pins are white with red dots, and in the case of this very throwback-style parlor guitar, they definitely stick out a bit. Another difference with this model is the side-mounted gold tuners, which are absolutely on point. Interestingly, the top on this 0012 had a few spots where the Sitka spruce grain wasn't exactly straight.

Martin VP Fred Greene explains: "We're trying to be more environmentally conscious with our woods. If it's structurally sound, there's no good reason to waste it, and there is beauty to be found in those slight distinctions — like Cindy Crawford's birthmark."

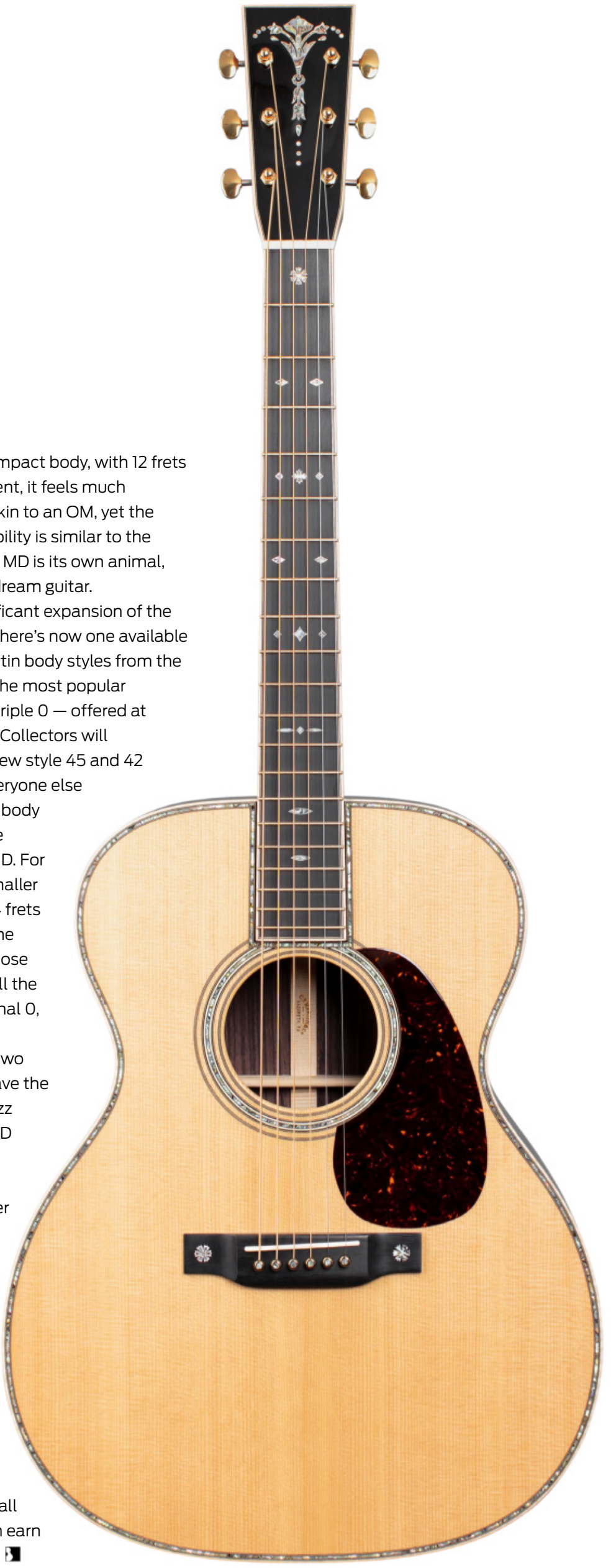
This 000-42 MD is one of the most easily playable and stylistically flexible Martins I've ever come across. Like all Modern Deluxes, the neck is modeled after the 1930 OM-45 Deluxe hanging in the Martin Museum, but this one feels a little less asymmetrical and more C-shaped. It's awesome for playing anything from country blues to classic rock, using varied approaches from a pick to fingerstyle or hybrid picking. The sound is right in the sweet spot as well: not too booming, not too bright — a real Goldilocks zone. Compared to the OM-28 Modern Deluxe, the tone is a bit more mellow and less articulate, due to the slightly shorter length.

The 0012-28 represents the move into smaller sizes. Unlike the "regular" 00-28 MD, which is essentially a smaller version of the triple 0, this 0012 has 12 frets to the body, and the body has that very classic, more slender look of a pre-1930 Martin parlor guitar. It's wonderfully compact, yet very loud and super resonant, with sustain for days.

Compared to the 000-42 MD, the 0012-28 MD delivers a totally different playing experience. The neck is slightly wider and almost demands to be played fingerstyle. It has the same 24.9-inch scale length as the triple 0, but on its compact body, with 12 frets to the neck attachment, it feels much snappier and more akin to an OM, yet the flexible string bendability is similar to the triple 0. The 0012-28 MD is its own animal, and a fingerpicker's dream guitar.

With such a significant expansion of the Modern Deluxe line, there's now one available in all of the main Martin body styles from the past 120 years, with the most popular — dreadnought and triple 0 — offered at different style levels. Collectors will appreciate having a few style 45 and 42 models available. Everyone else can appreciate more body options, including the mahogany 000-18 MD. For those who want a smaller guitar that still has 14 frets to the body, there's the 00-28 MD, and for those that want to take it all the way back to the original 0, there's the 0-28 MD.

Regarding these two review units, if you have the cash and dig the snazz factor, the 000-42 MD looks as fabulous as it plays. If you're a dedicated fingerpicker or simply want a parlor-sized, old-world Martin with the contemporary functionality and above-Standard aesthetics that Modern Deluxe has to offer, then the 0012-28 MD has all the right moves. Both earn Editors' Pick Awards.



SPECIFICATIONS

0012-28 and 000-42 Modern Deluxe

CONTACT martinguitar.com
PRICES 00-12: $4,399 street; 000-42: $7,199

NUT WIDTH 00-12: 1 13/16"; 000-42: 1 ¾"; bone
NECK Genuine mahogany
FRETBOARD Ebony, 24.9" scale
FRETS 20
TUNERS 00-12: gold side-mount; 000-42: gold open
BODY East Indian rosewood back and sides with European flamed maple binding, VTS Sitka spruce top
BRIDGE Ebony with compensated bone saddle
ELECTRONICS Optional, but not included as tested
FACTORY STRINGS Martin Authentic Acoustic Lifespan 2.0 MA540T Light 92/8 Phosphor Bronze
WEIGHT 00-28: 3.8 lbs, as tested; 000-42: 4 lbs, as tested
BUILT USA

0012-28 Modern Deluxe

KUDOS Epitome of a modern/vintage parlor guitar. Delightful for fingerpicking. Lightweight, lively and loud
CONCERNS Red and white bridge pins stick out on this particular model

000-42 Modern Deluxe

KUDOS Stunning looks, fabulously versatile playability. Top-shelf craftsmanship
CONCERNS Fancy is pricey

REVEREND

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

25th Anniversary Limited Edition Six Gun HPP

TESTED BY DAVID HUNTER

PHEW! THAT QUARTER of a century went by in the blink of an eye. In the course of it, Reverend grew from a small Michigan company making guitars on a modernized Danelectro template to an Ohio-based outfit offshoring a comprehensive catalog of instrument designs that suit a range of needs and playing styles. The original Six Gun HPP was released a couple of years ago to lend a new pickup configuration to one of the company's longstanding body styles. Now it's doing honors as one of two guitars (including the Sensei Jr) and a bass (the Decision P) graced with special Limited Edition 25th Anniversary cosmetics to celebrate this milestone.

The Six Gun is Reverend founder Joe Naylor's own take on the offset-waist asymmetrical double-cutaway solidbody, reflecting a marriage of sumptuous curves and edgy angles in its familiar, yet original profile. It has a body of solid Korina, with comfort contours at the forearm and ribcage positions, plus subtle access contouring at the back of the cutaways around the neck joint. To celebrate the silver anniversary, it's dressed in a Metallic Silver Freeze finish, with white binding around the body's top, a brushed-aluminum pickguard and a pearl *XXV* inlay at the 12th fret. The fingerboard itself is upgraded from the standard rosewood or roasted maple to ebony. All told, it's a superbly classy look and an apt statement of the company's pride in reaching this milestone.

As ever, it's a 25 ½–scale, bolt-neck build with a roasted maple neck, which, on our example, displays a lovely grain with some subtle flame across its back. It's carved to what Reverend calls a "medium oval" profile — pretty much a comfortably rounded medium C, by most standards. As we've come to expect from Reverend, the entire thing is replete with clever design touches that increase performance and usability without screaming for attention. Access to the dual-action truss rod is via an open channel at the headstock end, and the headstock carries Reverend's Pin-Lock tuners and a nifty offset triple string tree that increases tension across the nut for all three unwound strings.

SPECIFICATIONS

25th Anniversary Limited Edition Six Gun HPP
CONTACT reverendguitars.com
PRICE $1,199 street

NUT Synthetic bone, 1.692" wide
NECK Maple, medium oval profile
FRETBOARD Ebony, 25.5" scale, 12" radius
FRETS 22 medium-jumbo
TUNERS Reverend Pin-Lock
BODY Solid Korina
BRIDGE Wilkinson WVS50 IIK vibrato
PICKUPS Reverend HA5 humbucker in the bridge position and 9A5 P-90s neck and middle
CONTROLS Master volume and tone, contour, five-way switch
FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario .010–.046
WEIGHT 8.1 lbs
BUILT Korea

KUDOS A well-built and impressively versatile guitar that segues effortlessly from girth and power to brighter, snappier tones
CONCERNS Some players might enjoy a more vintage-leaning humbucker in the bridge position

The vibrato bridge is Wilkinson's WVS50 IIK, a modern two-point design with individually adjustable saddles, a push-in arm and a good reputation for return-to-pitch stability. It has an easy action and more than enough drop for serious dive bombing, with some up-bend also available. A fingerboard extension allows 22 medium-jumbo frets, which are all flawlessly dressed and polished, aiding a guitar that plays extremely confidently right out of the two-tone, teardrop-shaped case. To my eye, one oddity amid the otherwise plush esthetics is the use of off-white plastic dots for the rest of the fingerboard's position markers, when pearl dots matching the silvery pearl 12th-fret inlay might have been a more elegant option. Dealer's choice, I guess.

The HPP pickup selection that gives the guitar part of its name includes a Reverend HA5 bridge humbucker plus two 9A5 P-90s in the middle and neck position, wired to a five-way switch that should deliver some Strat-on-steroids voicings. The Alnico V humbucker is a hottish affair, wound to around 13.32k ohms using 43-AWG wire. The P-90s are more vintage-leaning, wound with more traditional 42-AWG wire to around 7.65k ohms each and also boasting Alnico V magnets. In addition to the master volume and tone, the electronics include Reverend's handy Bass Contour control, which I've always found extremely effective at tweaking pickups across the dark-to-bright/thick-to-thin voicing spectrum.

I tested the 25th Anniversary Six Gun HPP through a Friedman Mini Dirty Shirley and 2x12 cab, a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo, and a Neural DSP Quad Cortex modeler into my studio monitors, and in all scenarios found it a great performer. One of the more immediate stand-out impressions is the model's impressive versatility. Between the pickup configuration and the simple but extremely effective control complement, there are a lot of bold and original tones available, as well as plenty of "sculptability" for crafting familiar sounds that stand in well for the timeless classics. Through it all, the Korina-maple-ebony wood combination works toward a solid, yet articulate response, with tight lows, balanced mids and some extra harmonic sparkle in the highs.

The power is there in abundance via the hot-leaning humbucker, so sizzling rock leads and power-chord crunch are second nature to this thing. But dialing down the volume control just slightly and winding the contour fully counterclockwise lets the humbucker do a much better single-coil impersonation than almost any coil-splitting options I can recall. Via the same process, the P-90s convert from fat to thin single-coils, while retaining plenty of richness and character. Sure, these tweaks might not sway you from your prized pre-CBS Stratocaster, but the 25th Anniversary Six Gun HPP has a good take on most general renditions of the breed, and certainly with enough confidence to pull off your David Gilmour–, Mark Knopfler– and SRV-inspired voicings in front of a sweaty club crowd on a Saturday night.

The guitar plays superbly well in every regard, and any real weaknesses are difficult to ferret out, especially considering what it delivers at this price point. If anything, I think I would personally enjoy the 25th Anniversary Six Gun HPP with a vintage PAF–style humbucker in the bridge position, allowing a little more sweetness there in full-girth mode. But that's a matter of taste, and with the contour control to dial back the higher-gain humbucker's thickness, Reverend likely calculated that it gives that position some extra gusto.

Truly, though, if I were limited to a budget just slightly north of $1k and needed one solid guitar to tackle a wide range of sounds and styles, this would likely be a top contender for the job. The Reverend 25th Anniversary Six Gun HPP deserves an Editor's Pick Award for that achievement.

PHIL JONES BASS

Nanobass X4 digital amp

TESTED BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

FOR REASONS OBVIOUS from the company's name, Phil Jones Bass may not be known to many guitarists. Jones has been active in pro audio for decades, and for the past 20 years has built his reputation in the bass world with a line of compact amps and combos that deliver impressive power and pristine tone. The new Nanobass X4 digital amp reviewed here is the smallest and most portable combo Phil Jones Bass has made, and while it's part of PJB's bass amp line, it's a full-range combo (68Hz to 15kHz) that's suitable to virtually any instrument, including electric guitar. PJB sent one over so I could see how it measures up as a guitar practice amp.

The X4 is smaller than an eight-inch cube, packs 35 watts and delivers full-range sound

SPECIFICATIONS

Nanobass X4 digital amp
CONTACT pjbworld.com
PRICE $359

OUTPUT 35 watts Class D
SPEAKER PJB N52 NeoPower 4" driver with Rectangular Auxiliary Low Frequency Radiator (RALFR)
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 68Hz–15KHz
CONTROLS Input level with clip LED, aux/Bluetooth 5.0 with mode select, bass (shelf 100Hz, +/-15dB), mid (shelf 1kHz Bandwidth 120Hz-10Kz, +/-15dB), treble (shelf 10kHz, +/-15dB), volume (master)
I/O 1/4" instrument in, 3.5mm stereo aux in, 3.5mm headphone, Bluetooth 5.0
OTHER Universal voltage (100–240V), 6' angled AC power cord
DIMENSIONS 6.3 x 7.9 x 7.8 inches (WxHxD)
WEIGHT 5.3 lbs
BUILT China

KUDOS Small and light, with powerful tone and impressive soundstage for its size. Potent three-band tone sculpting. Looks sharp as well
CONCERNS Some may not like the absence of a battery-power option

It's a tiny thing, slightly smaller than an eight-inch cube and weighing just a tad over five pounds, but it packs a punch, delivering 35 Class D watts through its four-inch speaker. It also looks smart in its red covering, which feels rather like supple leather. (White and black are also available.) As modern practice amps go, the X4 is spartan. There are no built-in effects, rhythm machines or digital recorders. PJB has put its emphasis on tone with the X4, and it shows. However, there is Bluetooth 5.0 connectivity, allowing you to stream audio through this surprisingly high-fidelity system, as well as a stereo 3.5mm auxiliary input for external audio or a rhythm machine.

The amp's top panel is where you'll find all inputs, outputs and controls. The X4 has a 1/4-inch instrument input, the afore-mentioned 3.5mm stereo aux input and a 3.5mm mono headphone jack. Controls comprise an input level with clip LED for the 1/4-inch input, an aux/Bluetooth 5.0 volume control with mode select button and indicator light (steady green for aux, steady blue for Bluetooth and flashing blue when pairing), a trio of tone controls — bass, mid and treble — offering a potent 15dB of boost and cut, and a volume control that governs the output level from the speaker and headphone jack. The aluminum knobs are finished in elegant satin black, with an aluminum dot indented on top and a beveled edge that reveals the metal beneath. The knobs are well spaced, pleasant to grip and have a precise feel. They look smart as well, and the bare aluminum edge helps them stand out against the black control panel.

Around front, a metal grille covers PJB's proprietary N52 NeoPower four-inch driver, which was developed to have both full range and greater power handling via a custom Rectangular Auxiliary Low Frequency Radiator (RALFR) that reduces the speaker cone excursion. Despite the X4's tiny size, PJB put a lot of thought into the cabinet, which is heavily braced internally and damped to prevent cabinet coloration. Everything here is designed to let you hear your instrument as it actually sounds.

The digital end includes an analog-to-digital converter chip at the front running at 96kHz sampling rate, and a Class D power amp that renders high-resolution audio. Class D amps have the advantages of running cool, weighing little and packing plenty of power. And while early examples suffered from harsh-sounding artifacts, those issues have been worked out in the modern era, making these amps efficient and light, with no sacrifice in audio quality.

All those benefits are evident in the X4. I tested it with a range of guitars, including my go-to Gibson ES-345, a Fender Triple

Jazzmaster with Tim Shaw pickups and a Reverend Contender RB, using a selection of effects pedals. Whatever guitar I played, the little X4 delivered clear and powerful tone, with a deep soundstage that belies the combo's size. But it's that three-band EQ circuit that really impressed me, with its power to cut and boost judiciously where necessary or desired. Just for fun, I plugged a vintage Wurlitzer electric piano into the X4 and was surprised by how good it sounded throughout its five-octave range. Likewise, a Korg KR-55 Pro rhythm box rocked out nicely through the auxiliary input, as did tracks streamed via Bluetooth, and while I'd typically play either through my studio monitors, the X4 makes for a convenient option.

Some may complain that, for all its compact size and light weight, the X4 lacks a battery-power option. Jones replies that while he "would have loved to include a battery option, however this does pose some problems," which include a "large increase in price, as the lithium battery required would need to be substantial." He also points to restrictions on shipping and storage of lithium batteries, such as when flying.

Those who want a battery-powered portable amp will have to look elsewhere. But as a toneful desktop companion with auxiliary inputs and Bluetooth 5.0, the X4 is a loud, proud and versatile performer that will blow you away with its clarity and power while taking up next to no space whatsoever. Some may prefer a practice amp with more bells and whistles, but if your first priority is to hear your instrument in all its glory, PJB's straightforward, no-nonsense X4 will give you what you crave.

POSITIVE GRID

Spark MINI smart guitar amp and bluetooth speaker

TESTED BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

THE INVENTIVE MINDS at Positive Grid have been busy dreaming up new gadgets to make guitarists' lives productive, fun and filled with great tone. Last month I looked at the company's new RIFF guitar audio interface and app. This issue, I'm checking out the new Spark MINI practice combo and Bluetooth speaker. It's a more compact version of the desktop Spark smart guitar amp and app I reviewed in our July 2020 issue, but don't be fooled by its size — it packs all the same features into a handsome cube measuring a mere 5.76 x 4.84 x 6.49 inches and weighing just over three pounds.

In a nutshell, Spark MINI is a 10-watt stereo combo with 33 amp models and 43 useful guitar effects (including delay, reverb, modulation, compressor, noise gate and much more) powered by Positive Grid's BIAS tone engine. No doubt you did a double-take at the term "*stereo combo.*" Remarkably, Spark MINI delivers nearfield stereo sound from a pair of two-inch speakers angled eight degrees from one other. On the bottom, a passive radiator pumps out omnidirectional bass. The cabinet sits on four feet with three contact points each that help decouple the speaker from whatever surface it's on. The result is a surprising amount of punchy and well-defined bass from the compact cabinet — I could feel it pumping on my desktop even at medium volume levels. Overall, Spark MINI has a full-range sound with a pleasingly wide soundstage.

Like its big Spark sibling, it has an auxilliary input for connecting external audio devices and Bluetooth connectivity for streaming audio. There's also a USB-C connector that allows Spark MINI to work as a simple 1x2 audio interface for recording at a CD-quality 16-bit/44.1kHz.

The main performance controls are on the amp's top, set in a glossy black panel with gold lettering. Here you'll find the 1/4-inch guitar input, individual volume controls for the guitar signal and external music, and a knob for selecting from the four guitar presets: Custom, Solo, Lead and Rhythm. Around back are a stereo line out, a stereo aux in and the USB connection that connects Spark MINI to your computer for recording and doubles as the charging input. There's also a pair button for connecting with Bluetooth devices, including handheld devices running the Spark app (more on this below). Press the button once to engage pairing, or hold it to put the amp in Tuner mode. Finally there's the power button. Spark MINI reaches full charge in three hours to deliver up to eight hours of use with the volume set halfway or lower (play time decreases at higher volumes).

Like its big brother, Spark MINI is a handsome combo in a glass-fiber cabinet covered with Tolex and sporting a black-and-brown woven grille. (The amp is also available in Pearl with a white grille.) Build quality is excellent, and the unit feels solid and tough. I had no qualms about carrying it from room to room — there's a handy leather strap attached for just that purpose — or tucking it into a backpack when traveling.

So, you may be wondering, how does Spark MINI do so much with just a handful of

SPECIFICATIONS

Spark MINI Smart Guitar Amp & Bluetooth Speaker
CONTACT positivegrid.com
PRICE $229. Check website for current specials

OUTPUT 10 watts
SPEAKERS 2" custom design (x2), passive radiator
CONTROLS Four programmable preset selector, guitar channel volume, music channel volume, power button, pair/tuner button
I/O 1/4" guitar Input, 1/8" aux input, 1/8" headphone/line output. USB-C
ONBOARD EFFECTS 33 amp models, 43 effects
WIRELESS Bluetooth 5.0
USB 1 in x 2 out audio interface, 16-bit/44.1kHz
DIMENSIONS 5.76" x 4.84" x 6.49"
WEIGHT 3.3 lbs
BUILT China

KUDOS Compact stereo format, with spacious and detailed sound. Loads of onboard amp models and effects and more available from the ToneCloud community. Bluetooth and USB audio add even more versatility
CONCERNS None

controls? The answer is the free Spark app, which gives you a full set of virtual controls to fine-tune your tone, dial in presets and effects, and gain access to new presets from the online ToneCloud community. The app also gives Spark MINI all the features that come with Spark, including the Auto Chords learning tool that analyzes songs and displays chords in real time, and Video Capture, which lets you record high-quality video and audio.

There's something new here as well. The original Spark included a Smart Jam feature that automatically generates bass and drum backing to your playing. The new Smart Jam Live adds a virtual drummer that analyzes your playing and changes in complexity and intensity, in real time, making the jam feature even more useful for practice and songwriting.

The short story here is that Spark MINI sounds excellent and is a whole lot of fun to use. The BIAS-powered amp models and effects provide unlimited tone tweaking, and the fact that the amp is portable and

battery-powered makes it a great companion for travel and performance. I took my test unit on a weekend getaway, along with my Fender Jazzmaster, an Arturia KeyStep Pro MIDI controller and my laptop, and had a productive time writing, jamming and recording using the Spark MINI as both my speaker and audio interface. Think of it as a Swiss Army knife for guitarists on the go.

In the weeks since I received Spark MINI, I've also plugged synthesizers and electric pianos into it, and used it to stream music from my laptop. Whatever the situation and source material, it's consistently wowed me with its full sound and deep set of audio features. For being small, versatile and delivering loads of great tones and musical joy, Spark MINI gets our Editors' Pick award.

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Nano Pulsar

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

ELECTRO-HARMONIX INTRODUCED the original Pulsar around 1979, and it was one of the first tremolo pedal effects. *Original* is the operative word here, because like most EHX devices, it offered a unique take on a classic sound. From the beginning, the pedal provided many more sound-shaping possibilities than your classic amp tremolo. There was a switch to toggle between amp-like triangle and synth-style square-wave choppiness, as well as a knob to further shape the character of the unit's pulsing, volume-sculpted rhythms. Over the years, while retaining the same controls, the pedal went from a small housing to a larger one, then returned to a smaller, more robust package with a stereo option that adds panning to the equation.

The new Nano version is the smallest housing yet, yet it sacrifices no modifiers or stereo functionality. In fact, an additional control has been added. As there is often a perceived level drop when a tremolo effect is engaged, EHX has included a volume control to compensate for this.

SPECIFICATIONS

Nano Pulsar
CONTACT ehx.com
PRICE $99 street

CONTROLS Volume, depth, rate, shape, waveform toggle.
EXTRAS Stereo operation
SIZE 4.5" x 2.75" x 2.1"
BUILT USA

KUDOS Wide range of inspiring tremolo and pan effects in a small, affordable package
CONCERNS Begs for a tap tempo option

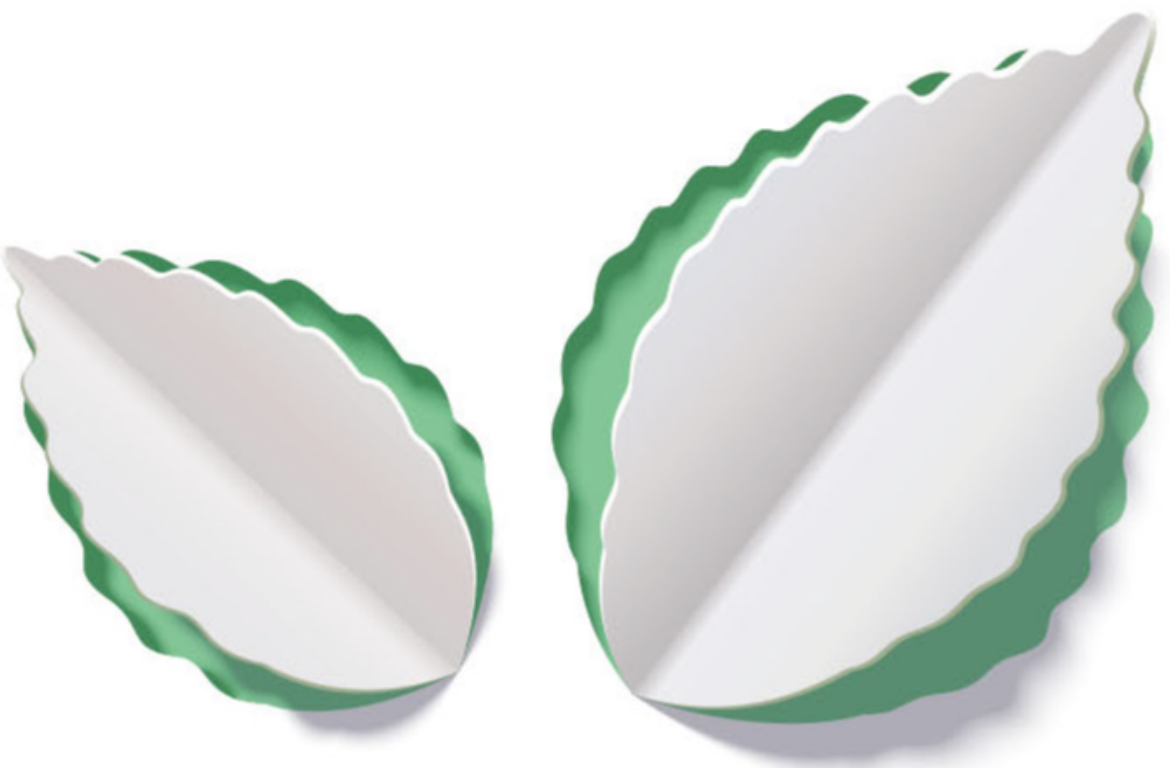
The depth knob is just one area in which this pedal differs from your typical tremolo/panning effect. It has the usual function of adjusting the amount of tremolo, but push it past around one o'clock and the modulation becomes asymmetrical, warping the audio signal between positive and negative phases. To my ears, it then hovers somewhere between a Leslie and a harmonic tremolo.

The rate knob provides an enormous range of speed adjustment for the tremolo or pan effect. At it slowest, I found it unusable for tremolo, but when set to run very slow on the square wave setting, it made for an interesting panning effect, as the signal spent a long time in one amp before jumping to the other. At high speeds it enters into ring-modulation territory.

The shape knob gradually shifts from falling to rising sawtooth, and from narrow to wide pulse width. The rate/status LED pulses to show the speed of the effect when its engaged. The Pulsar runs on an included nine-volt battery or an optional power supply.

If you're trying to match the sound of the classic amp tremolo in your Fender or Vox, the Nano Pulsar might not be for you, although I could definitely get a usable vintage-style sound from it. Where this pedal came alive was when I stomped on my octave fuzz and ran it through a galloping square-wave rhythm for a terrific analog synth-style sound. There is no tap tempo, so, live, you will have to start the song and have the drummer match the tempo you set on the pedal. Using it to record with a drum loop, I was able to set the rhythm to sync for as long as my guitar chords sustained, which is all you really need.

Thanks to the interaction between the shape, depth and rate controls, the Pulsar presents an abundance of cool sounds that can't be achieved with standard amp tremolo. With no presets and the aforementioned lack of tap tempo, the Pulsar may find use largely in the studio, but you could easily stumble across a couple of unique sounds that you must have for live performance. In fact, with the Nano Pulsar's small size and low price, you could strap two of them on your board for less than the cost of some larger boutique pedals.



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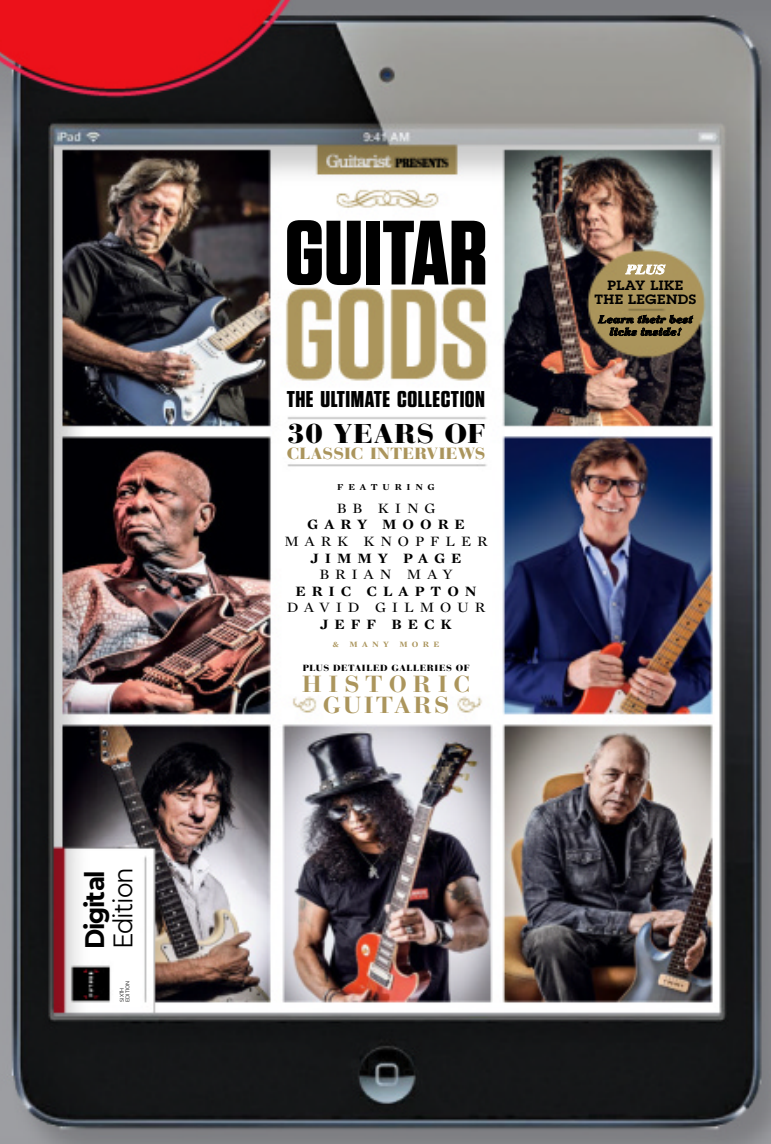

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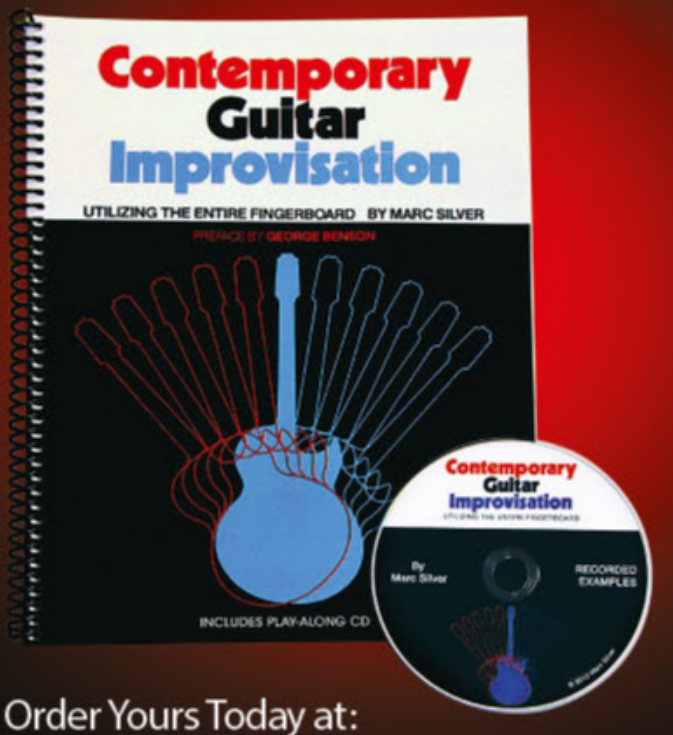

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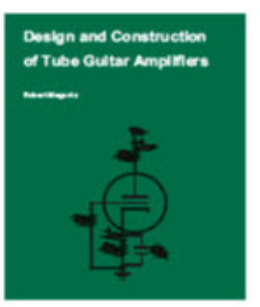

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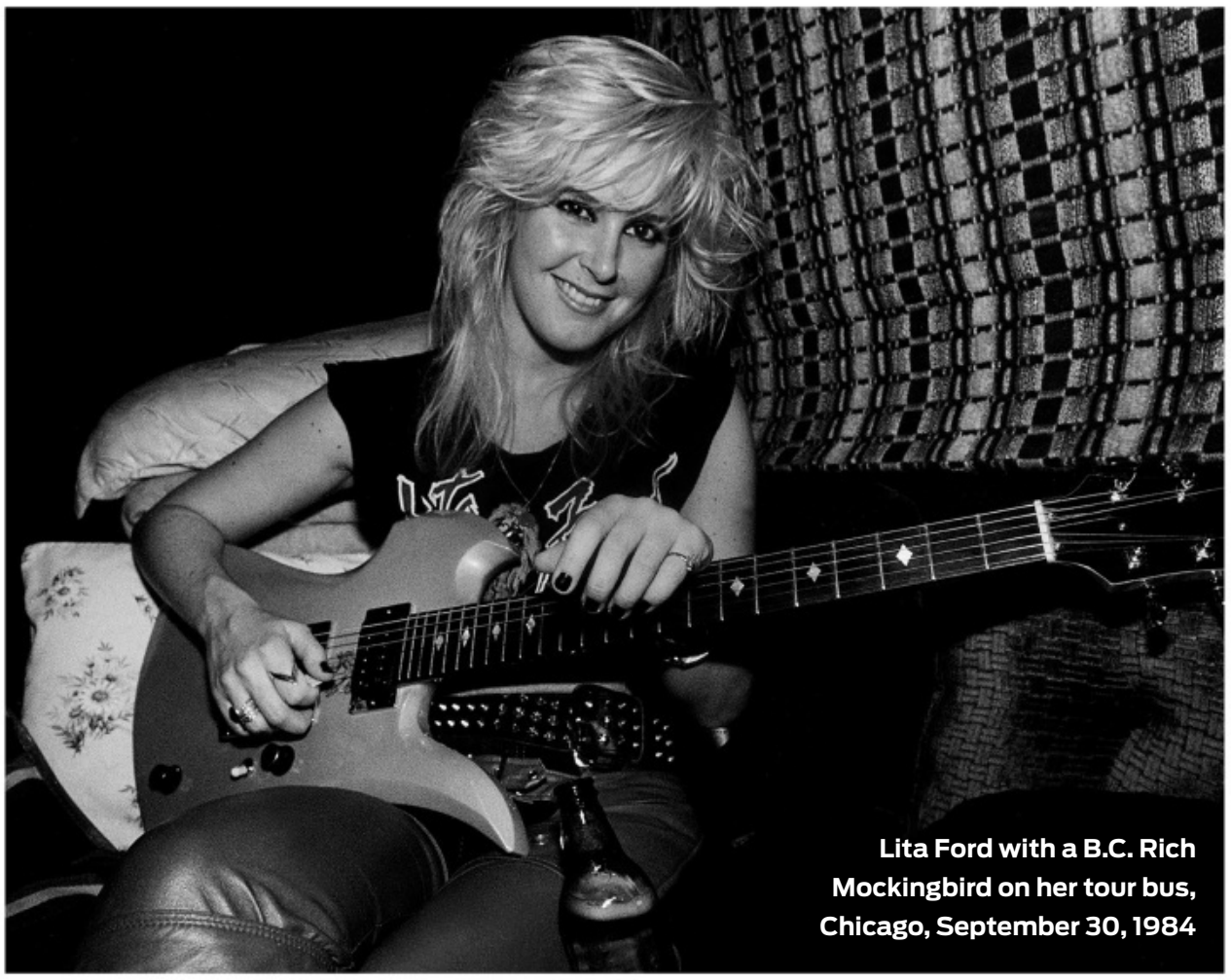
Lita Ford looks back at her badass signature 1989 power ballad.

BY JOE BOSSO



Lita Ford with a B.C. Rich Mockingbird on her tour bus, Chicago, September 30, 1984

GO AHEAD AND call "Close My Eyes Forever" a power ballad. Singer/guitarist Lita Ford won't mind. In fact, she enthusiastically embraces the term. "I don't know why power ballads have such a bad rap," she says. "I think they're badass. And 'Close My Eyes Forever' is as badass as it gets."

Ford's dark and dramatic duet with Ozzy Osbourne was a career high — chart-wise, that is — for both artists, hitting number eight on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1989. "That's pretty incredible," Ford says. "For all the success that Ozzy had in Black Sabbath and as a solo star, he'd never had a Top 10 single. And in terms of my career, it put me on a new level entirely. For so many reasons, it's a very special song to me."

EVERYBODY INTO THE POOL

Having achieved moderate success with her first two solo albums, *Out for Blood* (1983) and *Dancin' on the Edge* (1984), the former Runaways lead guitarist signed with Sharon Osborne Management and recruited pop/new wave hitmaker Mike Chapman (Blondie, the Knack) to produce her third album, *Lita*. The record was nearly finished when, one day, Sharon and Ozzy paid an unexpected visit to the studio. "We were just hanging out," Ford recalls. "Ozzy and I started shooting a game of pool, which turned into many games. Eventually, Sharon got bored and left me with Ozzy. We opened a bottle of wine and were having a grand old time."

After a while, the two moved their party to an isolation booth to get away from noisy studio engineers. Ford picked up a guitar and started strumming. "It wasn't anything I had already written; the whole thing was spontaneous," she explains. "Then Ozzy began singing these lines: 'If I close my eyes forever, will it all remain the same?' I was like, 'That's great!' I sang words back to him, and before we knew it, we had most of the song written. It was like magic."

"SCREAMING, CRYING" PERFECTION

Ford went home and finished the song on her own, and the next day she was back in the studio to record the track. "Mike Chapman knew a good song when he heard one," she says. "I think everybody thought this one was a no-brainer." The basic tracks — which included bassist Don Nossov and keyboardist David Ezrin performing to programmed drums — went quickly and smoothly, with Ford playing an Ovation 12-string acoustic on the intro and her trusty B.C. Rich Warlock for the crunchy electric rhythms. The stinging guitar solo, however, took some work. "It had to be screaming, crying, melodic — and something people could hum," Ford says. "It was all improv. I did a few passes because Mike was a perfectionist — 'Do it again!' I played it till it was the best I could do."

When it came time to record the vocal duet, Chapman arranged Ford and Ozzy face to face but separated them with a sheet of Plexiglas. "It was a standard duet — 'I'll sing the first half, you sing the second' — so it didn't take long to arrange the parts," Ford says. "It was awesome. Ozzy and I had a great chemistry. We vibed off each other beautifully."

"THE SOLO HAD TO BE SCREAMING, CRYING, MELODIC. AND SOMETHING PEOPLE COULD HUM"

HOT FOREVER

Released in 1988, *Lita* performed well. Its first two singles, "Kiss Me Deadly" and "Back to the Cave," set things up nicely for "Close My Eyes Forever," which exploded out of the box on radio and MTV, propelling the album to Platinum status. "Some hit songs surprise you, but with this one, we would have been surprised if it wasn't a hit," Ford says. "It didn't have to build. It was hot right away. Some things are just meant to be."

Since its release, "Close My Eyes Forever" has been a fixture in Ford's live shows. She performs the vocal duet with her longtime co-guitarist, Patrick Kennison. To replicate all of her guitar parts in concert, she utilizes a six-/12-string B.C. Rich Warlock double-neck. "Whenever I pull out the double-neck, the crowd goes crazy. They know what's coming," she says. "I get chills every time I play it. When I look out at the audience, I see people with tears in their eyes as they sing along. It's an incredible feeling to see that. I never thought a song of mine would have such a powerful impact on so many people. They tell me all the time how much it's meant to them in their lives. And I have to say, I feel the same way. It means more to me now than ever."

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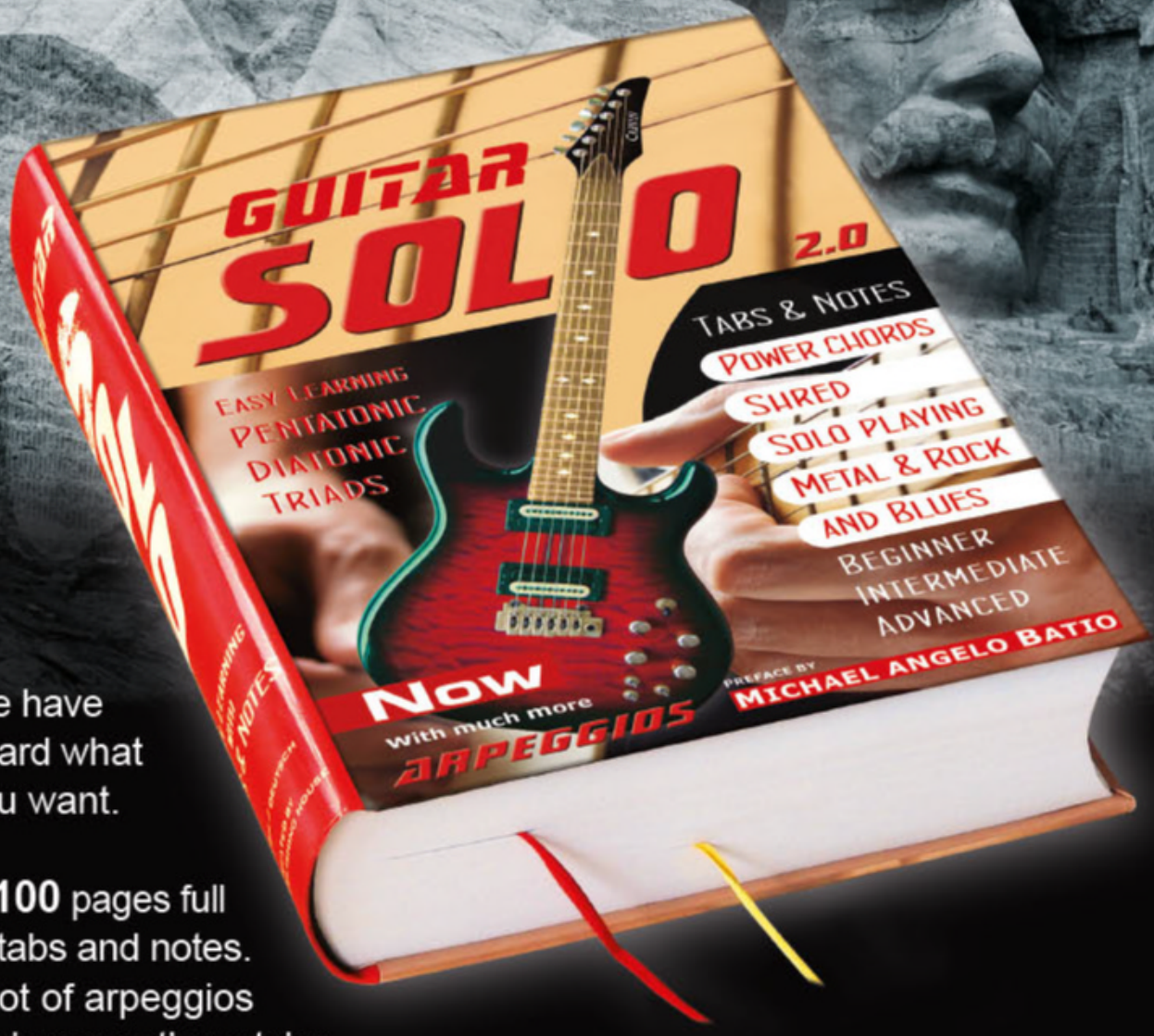

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